

Love and the Individual

The Morality of Platonic Love and its Metaphysical Presuppositions

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Suppose you were molding gold into every shape there is, going on non-stop remolding one shape into the next. If someone then were to point at one of them and ask you, “What *is* it?”, your safest answer by far, with respect to the truth, would be to say “gold”, but never “triangle” or any of the other shapes that come to be in the gold, as though it *is* these, because they change even while you’re making the statement.

Timeaus, 50a–b

“That,” he said, “is my speech about Love, Eryximachus. It is rather different from yours. As I begged you earlier, don’t make comedy of it...”

Symposium, 193d

Abstract

What is it that we really love when we love an individual person, and to what extent are we egoistical in the search for happy love? Moreover, what/whom should we love, and for what reason? I approach the subject “Love and the Individual” by analyzing Gregory Vlastos’ two main charges against Plato’s theory of love: Firstly, that Plato’s theory fails to give a satisfying account of love directed from one individual towards another *individual*; and secondly, that it is essentially *egoistical*. Throughout the thesis I underscore the points considered vulnerable to criticism, and highlight the phenomena subjected to insufficient treatment. As I assess Vlastos’ charges, three Platonic dialogues will be discussed in depth: the *Symposium*, the *Lysis* and the *Phaedrus*. With a few passages from other dialogues, I hope to complete the picture.

Preface and Acknowledgements

Soon enough I learned that one never finishes with Plato. The fusion of philosophical problems and disciplines, the variation of dramatic devices and the many characters: all together, this causes unforeseeable turns and difficulties of interpretation. On top of this, we naturally have the dialogue's original language, ancient Greek. In quotations from Plato I have consistently used the authoritative translations in John Cooper's edition *Plato's Complete Works* (1997). I have also taken the freedom of transliterating the frequent use of Greek letters by scholars into Roman.

As some of you may know, when studying Plato, the amount of secondary literature is overwhelming. In addition to Gregory Vlastos' article "The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato",¹ I have chosen to pay specific attention to the contributions by Martha Nussbaum, L.A. Kosman, Mary Margaret McCabe, Frisbee Sheffield, Terry Penner and Christopher Rowe, and Vlastos' former student Terence Irwin. Several other important scholars of ancient philosophy inherited the debate which followed from Vlastos' critique of Plato; and naturally, scholars also wrote on Platonic love before Vlastos published his well-known article. It would, however, be an impossible assignment to include them all. I therefore ask my reader to have sympathy on this point.

As you may suppose, studying Plato has been challenging. But it was worth the effort; I hope the same goes for my thesis. And although I probably never will "finish" with Plato, I have many people to thank for having accomplished this paper: First of all I want to thank my fellow students at the Department of Philosophy, Classics, History of Art and Ideas at the University of Oslo, for contributing to an inspiring, exciting and challenging working environment. I also want to express my appreciation to my supervisor Professor Øyvind Rabbås, for his guidance and for being encouraging all the way. I am also grateful to Ingrid A. Evans, Morten Johansen, Ole Martin Moen, and Helga Forus for good discussions and critical comments.

"For love is a difficult topic to think and write about at any time; and life does not always assist the investigation" (Nussbaum, 1990:314). To friends and family: Thank you all for love, support and good spirits throughout the gestation of this thesis, and at all other times.

¹ "The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato" was first published in 1969. For a more detailed presentation of Gregory Vlastos, see appendix.

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1 Introduction

We have all read Gregory on love so often, the paper has been so much discussed, debated, and perhaps even refuted, that we may easily fail to appreciate the *courage* required to write and publish it. In 1969 love was not a common topic for philosophy seminars. (Burnyeat, 1992:138)

1.1 Love as philosophical subject

Love is often ignored by great philosophers. For how can love be the subject of a philosophical analysis? Indeed, the philosophical subject “love and the individual” might provoke those who believe that proper philosophy should be conducted in a way that is detached from personal issues. However, while it is true to say that subjects like “love” represent subjective matters in life and therefore are challenging as objects of theoretical examinations, I believe that we in the past two or three decades may identify a change regarding attitudes towards philosophical problems that contain more subjective aspects. It seems to me that even though Plato, like other ancient philosophers, naturally held views which differ from what we may call modern perspectives and ideals, the popularity of ancient philosophy and virtue ethics is increasing precisely because it is concerned with fundamental aspects of the individual person’s life, including “subjective matters” such as love and happiness. Furthermore, I believe that the Platonic agent-focus and the invitation to (self-) reflection (as opposed to counseling through strict moral principles or “laws”) suit the modern reader perfectly.

As the title *Love and the Individual: The Morality of Platonic Love and its Metaphysical Presuppositions* indicates, this examination will require a treatment not only of questions concerning morality, but also of questions metaphysical in nature. And naturally, when studying Plato’s theory of love, one cannot exclude its epistemological implications. However, I have no wish to conceal the fact that the problem I am analyzing is connected to a concrete and regular problem: Love between individual persons. What is it that we really love, and to what extent are we egoistical in our search for happy love? Moreover, what/who *should* we love, and for what reasons?

Writing upon this subject, then, one is balancing between the theoretical study of Platonic aspiration and the various conceptions and convictions of “romantic rightness” – which is

undeniably present in the commentary literature upon this subject, as well as in one's own approach, whether as reader or writer.

1.2 Approach to the problem

Gregory Vlastos' article entitled "The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato" is used as a starting point and framework of this thesis. I will look into Vlastos' main charges against Plato's account of love: Firstly, that it fails to give a satisfying account of love directed from one individual towards another *individual*; and secondly, that his theory of love is essentially *egoistical*. The two charges might be connected in the following way: the Platonic lover seemingly loves the beloved *per accidens*, i.e. only in so far as the beloved embodies qualities considered advantageous for the lover himself. Applying Vlastos' own terms, I would say that the pivotal contrast in his criticism is that between: 1) Loving individuals as *placeholders of predicates* (this is connected to the first charge), and; 2) Loving individuals for *their own sake* (which is connected to the second charge).

For Vlastos, the two charges lead to the inevitable conclusion that within Plato's theory, "the individual, in the uniqueness and integrity of his or her individuality, will never be the object of our love." (Vlastos 1973:31) Vlastos strikes a nerve with this assertion. Compared with modern conceptions of love and the modern sensitivity to the individual's importance and value, I think it is fair to say that Plato appears as a cold-hearted egoist in the picture Vlastos paints for his readers.² I am thus inclined to believe that analyzing Vlastos' charges against Plato's theory of love might provide answers to more general questions, such as how Plato regarded the individual, and the nature of the often noted connection between eudaimonism and egoism. In my opinion, these questions are essential to all readers of Plato, as they deeply affect our interpretation of his writings, as well as leading us towards the Platonic core themes. These concern the theory of Ideas, and the fundamental question of all ancient philosophy: How we should live our lives.

² And clearly, Vlastos provoked many scholars with this description: "Gregory Vlastos, in a well-known essay, has paid Plato the tribute not of faded reverence, but of lively disparagement. He casts him as the champion of a 'spiritualized egocentrism'..." (Price, 1990:2).

1.3 Clarification of central terms

Several scholars have criticized Vlastos' usage of ancient Greek terms, arguing that Vlastos failed to see *eros* and *philia* as two different conceptions. The English term "love", which Vlastos mainly uses, fails to distinguish between *eros* and *philia*, as it covers both.³ Such remarks are most certainly a reminder of the importance of precision. Both *eros* and *philia* are the root of many derived words which make translation problematic, moreover, the words alone are not always reliable as guides to figuring out what sort of love is debated. As Vlastos points out there are twenty-two columns under the umbrella of *philia* alone in the *Liddel and Scott* dictionary of ancient Greek (Vlastos, 1973:4). Moreover, Plato offers various accounts of loving relationships, varying in degrees of intimacy and depth. Nevertheless, before continuing, I shall briefly clarify my subsequent use and perception of the two central ancient Greek terms *eros* and *philia*.

One may say that *philia* denotes friendly feelings, concern and care, whereas *eros* is often used in describing intense desire, for a particular person, or for victory or knowledge. In the dialogue *Lysis* *philia* is described as the "name of a relation". *Philia* denotes love for parents, children and close friends – although it may also be used in describing the relation of husband and wife, or imply sexual feelings between friends. Moreover, when talking about friends, we may roughly say that *philia* is between equals standing side by side, and that the friendship may be related to mutual utility, while *eros* is related to some kind of beauty and more specifically erotic relationships, which often are described in terms of a hierarchy between the lover and the beloved. *Eros* is also often described in less flattering terms than *philia*: like some kind of "madness"; a disease that causes fever, warmth and sweat, something that renders you weak and slavish, as if you were "pierced and bitten by a snake" (*Symp.* 217e–218a, 219b). Briefly, we may concur with Sappho that the experience of *eros* is bittersweet.⁴

But *eros* is not merely a principle or term, it is also described as a god, by Socrates as a half-god, a *daimon* (*Symp.* 202d) To distinguish between *eros* as a concept and Eros the god, I'll write "Eros" when referring to the god and "*Eros*" when referring to the term. There are many myths about Eros – some hold that he is the oldest and earliest of all Gods, others that he is the youngest; some say he is Aphrodite's son, others that he is her lover. In other myths, he is

³ C.f., e.g. Konstan, 1997:38

⁴ "Bittersweet" by and large inverts the actual terms of Sappho's *glukupikron* (literally "sweet-bitter"). See *Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta*, fr.130. For a more detailed discussion of Sappho and *eros*, see Carson (1986).

described as a woman. In any case, my focus is on Eros as he “appears” in the erotic dialogues I pay attention to. In *Symposium*, we find a myth about his genesis, his *arche* (*Symp.* 203b). His mother, Penia, whose name means something akin to “lack” or “poverty”, tricked his father Poros, “plenty”, into having a child with her. This dual parentage leads to Eros’ intermediate nature. There are several momentous aspects of his intermediacy between deprivation and abundance: He is described as a mediator between the world of Ideas and the world of appearances, of being and non-being, the beautiful and the ugly, the good and the bad, wisdom and stupidity. If he were entirely beautiful, he would have no need to love the beautiful, just as those “who are already wise no longer love wisdom, whether they are gods or men” (*Lys.* 218a).⁵

The two objections to Plato’s theory of love both point out that it seems to fail in giving a satisfying account of love between individuals, that is to say, love between parent and child, man and woman, lover and lover and friend and friend. Although I have pointed out some nuances between the terms *philia* and *eros*, which are used by Plato in description of these relationships, I have to admit that I concur with Vlastos in the translation of both of them into the wide-ranging term *love*. Therefore, I shall mainly discuss *love*, although I will also use the terms *eros* and *philia* when required. For example, when discussing the more ontological aspects of love I analyze *eros*, and when I discuss whether Lysis is loved by his parents, I use the term *philia*.

I would also like to clarify my usage of the conceptions *individuality* and *the individual*. “In the uniqueness of his or her individuality”, Vlastos argues, the individual cannot be the object of Platonic love (Vlastos, 1973:31). However, exactly what the “uniqueness” and “individuality” consists of remains mysterious as Vlastos does not offer a clear definition. My impression is that he uses “uniqueness” and “particularity” interchangeably, and I will therefore use the term *individuality* whenever describing the particularity of the whole of an individual’s composition. Regarding *the individual*, I suppose one could object, arguing that “the individual” is historically seen as a modern concept emerging from the Renaissance,⁶ and therefore that Plato does not undermine the individual (as Vlastos accuses him of) – but rather that conceptions of the individual are not to be found in Plato’s writings whatsoever.

⁵ This point is also stated in the *Symposium*, 204a–c.

⁶ The Renaissance (especially “Renaissance Florence”) is often described as the “birthplace” of (modern) individualism. This is connected to the recognition of the artist/scientist/statesman as a “genius”, a unique individual talent. (E.g. Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci.) For further reading, see Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* (1927).

Owing to such and similar remarks, I want to give two reasons for my usage of operating with “the individual”: 1) Plato was fascinated and genuinely concerned with *persons*: their ontology, their differences, their beliefs and arguments. With this in mind, I don’t think I would be wrong in exploring Plato’s view about what we may describe as “the individual” in matters of love. 2) We certainly live in a world where the individual is a central and sensitive issue. When we read Plato, we do so – at least partly – because we hope to learn something, not just about life in ancient Greece, but about ourselves as well.

1.4 Reflections on method

A methodological discussion is always necessary, particularly when studying Plato. How are we to determine “what Plato meant”? One of the aspects of Plato’s writings which make him challenging is that he writes as a philosopher *poet*, with a proximity to perhaps an ironically appropriated “mythopoeic view on the world” (Kosman, 1976:54). He does not write lecture-notes – he does not even write *in persona*, in his “own voice”. His many dramatic dialogues contain different characters, with different backgrounds and opinions, and they are not always consistent in their own views and argumentation. And what about Plato’s Socratic heritage, are we to take Socrates’ words for Plato’s? However, to grant Socrates the final authority does not necessarily render the interpretation of Plato any easier since Socrates, like most of the other characters in Plato, constitutes a complex appearance in the dialogues.

In the *Symposium* the complexity of the character Socrates is taken to another level. This dialogue contains several speeches about *eros* held by different characters, some of them historical, at a gathering in the tragic poet Agathon’s house. When it is Socrates’ turn, he divides himself up, so to speak, into two different characters. On the one hand, he appears as the lacking and youthful Socrates; on the other hand, he speaks for the wise Diotima. Socrates tells his interlocutors that he once visited the wise priestess Diotima because he came to realize that he was in need – just like the feeling of need had motivated Eros’ mother Penia to go looking for Poros (*Symp.* 207c).

Several scholars have criticized Vlastos and argued that he gives the mysterious Diotima all authority in his reading of Plato's *Symposium*, seemingly without any hesitation.⁷ This, of course, invites the "simple" question, *why*. I believe there are at least two reasons for this:

A) Diotima is the only person who is described as wise (*sophe*) in matters of love.
(*Symp.* 201d)

B) Diotima is called wise in these matters by *Socrates*, who is usually the intellectual hero in Plato's dialogues.

It is worth noticing that Socrates, who usually claims to be ignorant, in this dialogue proclaims that "I understand nothing – with the exception of love", and moreover assures that "I'd like to tell the truth" (*Symp.* 199b). Nevertheless, to treat any of the voices as Plato's mouthpiece seems unwise: Is Socrates actually telling the truth about the nature of *eros*, as he claims, or does he simply *think* he's telling the truth? Does he claim to know the truth because this is a subject "everyone" knows about, or is this the *only* subject he sees worthy of profound investigation? Or is he perhaps being ironic? I will return to this methodological discussion – which appears to be absent in Vlastos' writings.⁸

Vlastos clearly grants Diotima the authority since he reads Plato's position into her statements. Yet, he is indeed provoked by her speech. In the following, then, I briefly sum up a few of her statements which I believe provoked Vlastos. Firstly, Diotima distinguishes between *the individual* and *the good*, and claims that "what everyone loves is really nothing other than the good" (*Symp.* 205e). This, in Vlastos' account, makes the individual redundant when it comes to love, and reduces individuals to "placeholders of predicates". In this way, he argues, Plato fails to give an account of love directed toward *individual persons*, and moreover, he fails to value individuals in the wholeness of their uniqueness.⁹

⁷ One of them is Nussbaum. Her reading and critique of Vlastos will be examined in section 2.4.

⁸ Section 2.4. and 4.1.

⁹ Although Vlastos does not refer to Irving Singer, he seems to be significantly influenced by his work *The Nature of Love*, first published in 1966, (i.e. three years before Vlastos published his article):

The Platonic lover does not love *anyone*: he loves only the Good, either in abstraction or in concrete manifestations. But then, I insist, there is at least one kind of love that Plato's philosophy neglects. That is the love of persons, the love between human beings who bestow value upon another, each responding to the uniqueness of the other... (Singer, 1984:84).

Another influence, who Vlastos *does* refer to is Anders Nygren (Eng. trans.1969). Later several other scholars have promoted the charge of egoism against Plato, and virtue ethics in general (e.g. Thomas Hurka.) But it seems

Secondly, Vlastos rhetorically asks himself the extent to which Plato's theory of love acknowledges love to be *for the sake of the beloved* (Vlastos, 1973:6). A brief glance at Diotima's speech is sufficient to give a distinct impression that Vlastos was onto something: Diotima's speech describes interpersonal love in terms of utility, and love of the individual as slavish: "Looking now towards the multitude of beauty, no longer, like a slave, towards the beauty in an individual" (*Symp.* 210c7–d1). Thirdly, Diotima says that the lover loves something/someone because the lover thinks this will make *him*, the lover himself, happy.¹⁰

In addition to his criticism of Diotima's speech in *Symposium*, Vlastos reaches the conclusion that the egoistical perspective of Platonic love is unmistakable in the dialogue *Lysis* (Vlastos, 1973:8). Vlastos argues that in Plato's opinion, a person will be loved only insofar as he produces some good *for the person who loves* (Vlastos, 1973:7). In *Lysis*, Socrates engages in conversations with good-looking teenage boys from distinguished Athenian families, one of them a boy called Lysis. Socrates says to Lysis: "so it turns out that your father does not love you, nor does anyone love anyone else, so far as that person is useless." (*Lys.* 210c). In Vlastos' perspective, this adds up to his perception of Platonic love as "straightforward utility-love", and based on Socrates' subsequent examples in *Lysis* of why we love (*Lys.* 213e, 215d, 218e), he concludes that "no reason is offered why we could love anyone except for what we get out of him" (Vlastos, 1973:8). But how literally should we interpret Socrates here?

The selection of *which* dialogues to include is naturally also a methodological question one has to face when studying Plato. On Vlastos account, the *Lysis* failed to give a satisfying account of love of other persons *for their own sake*. In his search for this, then, he turned to Socrates' account of *eros* given in *Symposium*. However, another dialogue which also provides accounts of love is the *Phaedrus*, but Vlastos barely mentions this dialogue.¹¹ Nevertheless, I shall pay attention to this dialogue as well, as I believe that this dialogue ought to be examined when studying "Love and the Individual" in Plato, for at least three reasons: (1) For the various accounts of loving relationships here discussed. (2) That we here learn about the Athenian *paiderastia* and its connection to the concept of *individual learning* (and I believe a more profound investigation of this system is necessary in order to better understand

like Vlastos' objection is among those that carry the most weight since ancient scholars still refer specifically to *his* article when discussing the charge of egoism.

¹⁰ In exemplification I mainly use masculine pronouns, simply because when talking about love in Plato, the individual human beings discussed are by and large men.

¹¹ Vlastos, 1973: 20; 29; 32, and the footnotes no. 65, 66, 75, 88.

Plato's theory of love). Yet another reason for turning to the *Phaedrus* is (3) that this is the dialogue which provides the clearest advice on how the individual agent should orient himself in loving relationships, and how personal relationships are, after all, a central part of Plato's theory of love.

Another issue regarding Vlastos' method which I am going to emphasize is his claim that the standard he uses to measure Plato's theory of love is an Aristotelian one, derived from Aristotle's definition of *philia*.¹² I shall argue that Vlastos' standard also has significant "clandestine" Kantian contents, as he concludes that Plato's treatment of the individual is wrong due to Plato's lack of recognition that individuals have "intrinsic value as individual human beings", and "the fact" that all individuals are "ends in themselves". Seemingly, Vlastos squeezes this Kantian content into the Aristotelian phrase he refers to as love *for the beloved's own sake*. Contrasting eudaimonism and Kantianism in this way, although not explicitly, Vlastos focuses on their differences; then he gives the Kantian ideas precedence.

Yet another methodological discussion that imposes oneself in the study of Plato is that which concerns what kind of status one should give the myths and metaphors. We all know the expression "Platonic love". This phrase, in modern usage, describes love as detached from every kind of sexual involvement.¹³ Nevertheless, in the *Symposium*, most likely the origin of the well-known expression "Platonic love", Plato's language is full of erotic and physical metaphors and myths. I do not think these are external, i.e. "spice", or "aesthetic ornaments", but rather valuable in the understanding of Plato's theory of love, as they play a pedagogic role. Regarding the cosmic myths and metaphors, I support Kosman's view, that these "cosmic descriptions of love are not simple mythological atavisms which Plato overcomes in directing his philosophical attention to the moral questions of human intercourse." (Kosman, 1976:53) Amongst most of the Greek thinkers and poets, including Plato, we find the idea that if we know a phenomenon's *arche*, i.e. its genesis and principle, then we know the phenomenon's nature – to my mind, this applies in particular to the discussion of how to understand Platonic *eros*. The myths and metaphors will therefore be emphasized to a greater extent than Vlastos did in his article.

¹² More precisely, Aristotle describes to like (*to philein*) as "wanting for someone what one thinks good, for his sake and not for one's own, and being inclined, so far as one can, to do such things for him", and thereafter he defines a friend to be someone who likes/is liked by another person (C.f., e.g. Cooper, 1999:313; *Rhet.* 1380b35–1381a2; See also *EN.* 1166a2–5)

¹³ The phrase *amor platonicus* was first coined by Ficino, on the basis of his reading of *Symposium*. C.f., e.g. Sheffield, *Beyond Eros: Friendship in the Phaedrus*, p.1.

1.5 Outline

The structure of my investigation is as follows: Chapter 2, entitled “Ideas and Individuals”, is concerned with what I have decided to call *Vlastos’ first charge*; that Plato’s theory of love fails to give a satisfying account of love directed from one individual towards another *individual*. I approach this charge firstly (section 2.1) by providing a general representation of Plato’s ontology and the theory of the Ideas, and Vlastos’ arguments, that according to Plato, what we really love when loving individual persons are not the individuals *qua* individuals, but either a quality, a cluster of qualities, or at best the Idea itself. In section 2.2 I then discuss this paradox laid out by Vlastos, that in loving an individual person, one does not in fact love this individual, but something else. Thereafter (section 2.3) I look into the ontology of individuals, examining to what extent they may be said to be objects of change. Next, in section 2.4., I highlight two speeches in the *Symposium* which Vlastos by and large overlooks (those by Alcibiades and Aristophanes), and argue that much of what Vlastos ostensibly demands from a theory of love is actually to be found here.

Chapter 3, “Eudaimonic Love and Egoism” is based upon Vlastos’ charge that Platonic love is merely instrumental to the lover’s own happiness, and that Plato’s theory of love therefore is essentially *egoistical*. Firstly (section 3.1) I analyze Vlastos’ reading of the *Lysis*, and then, in section 3.2, the distinction between utility-love and end-love. Next, (section 3.3) I argue that the standard which Vlastos uses as a measurement against Plato’s theory of love has clandestine Kantian roots, and therefore offer a comparison of *eudaimonism* with Kantianism. I then (section 3.4) turn to the discussion of Platonic love as *self-love*, before I examine (section 3.5) the terms *endeeis* and *phusei oikeion*, and these terms’ connection to the more cosmic aspects of Platonic love.

I begin chapter 4, “Friends, Lovers and Toys”, with an examination of the backdrop of all the three relevant dialogues, the Athenian *paiderastia* (4.1), and how the relation between the lover and the beloved is described within this system. In section 4.2 I begin my analysis of the *Phaedrus*, firstly (section 4.2.1) the two first speeches and the dilemma which the young boy Phaedrus faces, then secondly (section 4.2.2) the third speech and some arguments suggesting that Plato through this speech *does* provide a satisfying account of interpersonal love.

The last section in each chapter is devoted to concluding remarks. I sum up and present my conclusions in chapter 5.

2 Ideas and Individuals

Vlastos' first charge:

Now since all too few human beings are masterworks of excellence, and not even the best of those we have the chance to love are wholly free of streaks of ugly, the mean, the commonplace, the ridiculous, if our love for them is to be only for their virtue and beauty, the individual, in the uniqueness and integrity of his or her individuality, will never be the object of our love. This seems to be the cardinal flaw in Plato's theory. It does not provide love of whole persons, but only love for the abstract versions of persons which consists of the complex of their best qualities. (Vlastos, 1973:31)

The quote cited above will be used as the focus of discussion in this chapter. To start with, I give an account of Vlastos' charge that proper love, according to Plato, is not love of an individual person *qua* that individual, but either love for such things as Beauty itself, or for the complex of beautiful qualities incorporated in the individual. I then turn to the question of how we may distinguish between "the whole individual" and the individual's properties. Lastly I look into Martha Nussbaum's arguments suggesting that much of what Vlastos seems to require from a theory of love is in fact to be found in Plato's dialogue the *Symposium*, after all, more precisely in the speeches delivered by Alcibiades and Aristophanes.

2.1 Particular objects and universal Ideas

The well-known distinction between particular objects and universal Ideas is fundamental to understanding Plato's works in general, but also specifically when it comes to his treatment of the individual, and the individual as an object of love. The distinction of particulars and Ideas leads us into the centre of Plato's ontology. Plato is often called a *dualist*, as he distinguishes between the world of appearances and the "world of Ideas". However, Vlastos describes Plato's ontology as roughly "tripartite":¹⁴

1. The transcendent, paradigmatic form: "Things" such as the Idea of Beauty.
2. Particular "things" in our experience which may have or lack the corresponding character: For example, individual persons, states, practices, which may or may not be beautiful.
3. The character of these entities: The Beauty they instantiate if they are beautiful.

¹⁴ The tripartite ontology I here describe is a shortened and rewritten version of his longer description (Vlastos, 1973:23).

Plato never made the details separating these levels fully clear. Nevertheless, a study of Plato's theory of love – and especially an assessment of the individual as an object of love within his theory – requires an examination of these three levels. There are indeed various ways of describing the relation between them. I shall now briefly outline my impression of how Vlastos thinks this tripartite ontology functions: If a particular object, say, an individual A (representing level 2), is beautiful b (level 3), then this beauty b *participates in* the Idea B (level 1). Alternatively, one may say that A through being b “exemplifies”, “copies” or “reflects” B.

Plato is said by Vlastos to value Ideas above particularity; “everywhere Plato gives the Form preeminence.” (Vlastos, 1973:34) Vlastos' perception is that it is the universal Idea that is “loveable” – and the individual only insofar as the individual copies the Idea:

the individual cannot be as loveable as the Idea; the Idea, and it alone, is to be loved for its own sake; the individual only in so far as in him and by him ideal perfection is copied fugitively in the flux. (Vlastos, 1973:34)

For the Platonic lover, in Vlastos' account, “things” such as individual persons (level 2) will not be objects of love; love will instead be directed towards the beauty of an individual person (level 3). And, as the quote above shows, in Vlastos' view Plato's ontology reflects a hierarchic order: Loving the Idea of Beauty (level 1) is distinctively better than to love the beauty of an individual person (level 3).

Man is the measure of all things, says Protagoras (*Tht.*151a ff.). Socrates argues against him that it is the Ideas that represent perfection, the Ideas that set standards; the Ideas are thus the measure of all things. The perfect ideals, as the Ideas represent, are never entirely realized in the actual world; concrete manifestations will be regarded in terms of how well they copy the ideal. In addition, the Ideas are eternal and immutable. How, then, do individuals with their limited senses learn about the Ideas? In the *Symposium* we hear about Eros' role as mediator and guide between the world of Ideas and the world of appearances. Moreover, although it is not mentioned in the *Symposium*, the treatment of desire and aspiration in the *Symposium* recalls the method of recollection, outlined in the *Meno*, the *Phaedo* and also the *Phaedrus*. Agents recognize value, such as beauty, and they are drawn towards such objects because of recognition. They pass from making several observations of particular things to gathering them into one concept, which in Plato is called *anamnesis* (recognition) (*Phdr.*249c). A common interpretation of the theory of recognition in Plato is that humans remember and recognize the Ideas from their pre-existence, based on the “soul trip” described in the

Phaedrus, where the souls glimpsed the Ideas as the wagon they “sat” in drove past them. When agents recognize beauty, then, it is because they already have a vague memory of it.

According to Vlastos, beauty is what the Platonic erotic lovers really love (Vlastos, 1973:26). Beauty, then, is said to be “pure, clear, unmixed, not full of human flesh and color and other mortal nonsense” (*Symp.* 211e). Unmixed and pure, that is, whereas each and every individual will always struggle with mixed elements of both beauty and ugliness. And this is the crux of the argument: Since the individual does not exclusively participate in the good and the beautiful, but always also in the ugly, the individual in its own mixed individuality can never be a proper object of love. In this way individual persons are *not* truly and wholly beautiful, but only the Idea alone, and therefore, according to Vlastos’ argumentation, it is the Idea the Platonic lover really loves.¹⁵

In Vlastos’ view then, what sort of “function” remains for the individuals to fill? According to Vlastos, Plato treats individuals as placeholders of predicates (Vlastos, 1973:26). He argues that Plato, as a consequence of his tripartite ontology, abstracts the quality of merit from the human being’s individuality. This way the person becomes merely an instance of – in Vlastos’ words “a placeholder of” – the pursued qualities. The value of loving individuals thus seems to lie in its power to awaken the lovers to long for something more valuable. In fact, all kinds of “lower-graded love”, (i.e. love for other individual persons, love of money, etc.) seem to represent *steps* towards loving something more valuable and precious, i.e. the abstract Idea itself. I take this to be Vlastos’ interpretation of the famous ladder-metaphor in the *Symposium* (*Symp.* 205d5). From where we’re standing now, the individual seems to be regarded merely as an instrument in the lover’s chase towards real love, and to Vlastos’ mind, this is objectionable.

¹⁵ But what does it mean, to “love an Idea”? And what does Vlastos think it means? I return to this in section 2.4. and 4.2.2.

2.2 Placeholders and predicates

What kind of desirable predicates, then, do these “placeholders” instantiate? According to Vlastos, Plato’s theory of love is about love of the predicates “useful” and “beautiful” (Vlastos, 1973:26).¹⁶ But how may we manage to escape the paradoxical consequence deduced by Vlastos, that according to Plato, in loving an individual we don’t actually love the individual, but something else; the predicates “useful” and/or “beautiful”? It appears to be an impossible assignment: If I love A because of A’s qualities (because A is useful, beautiful, whatever), then it is the qualities which constitute the object for my love, Vlastos argues. However; if I love A *regardless* of A’s merit or A’s particular qualities, then it is most certainly unclear to what extent I may claim to love precisely A. Unconditional love may therefore not provide the kind of recognition we are looking for, since it, then again, will be only accidental that A is loved; A would then have become, using Kosman’s apt description, “the recipient of an erotic lottery” (Kosman, 1976:57).

Kosman is skeptical to the detachment between the individual and his/her properties, which Vlastos is convinced not only exists in Plato’s theory of love, but also makes the individual an instrumental object of love. Kosman asks: “If I love A because of Ø, is what I love in A the object of my love and different from A in such a way that what I really love is Ø and not A?” (Kosman, 1976:64).¹⁷ In other words, if I love my partner because of my partner’s goodness, is what I really love in my partner the object of my love and different from my partner in such a way that I really love the goodness and not my partner? If “good” is something my partner *is*, why should – or how *could* – I be said to love something other than my partner?

Kosman’s article may be read as a critical comment to Vlastos’ viewpoints. Whereas Vlastos argues, as previously stated, that what the Platonic lover really loves is the predicate, the Ø and *not* the individual, the A, I take Kosman’s point to be that there is no good reason why someone who loves A because of Ø should be said to really love the Ø in A and not A in itself, if Ø is something A essentially *is*. I.e.; it is my partner I love, because he/she is good: *The goodness in my partner cannot be distinguished from my partner.*

This leads us towards yet another issue: the distinction between 1) the *object* of love, and 2) the *reason* for loving that object. If we adjust the example, maybe the detachment between A

¹⁶ “Useful” in cases of *philia*-love, and “beautiful” in cases of erotic love.

¹⁷ I take “A” to represent a person, and “Ø” in this concrete example to, roughly said, represent a property.

(individual person) and \emptyset (property) is not so strange after all. Consider the phrase “you only love me for my body”.¹⁸ The meaning of this phrase may be said to be “my body is not who I am – you don’t love me for *myself*”, even though this person will most likely have a body. Moreover, then, I take Kosman’s point to be that we want to be loved for the *right reason*, corresponding with who/what we consider ourselves *essentially* to be, i.e. I want to be loved for who I *am*, not what I *happen* to be, or what you *think* I am (if this conflicts with my own perception). As Kosman puts it: “in loving A for himself, I don’t love what A *happens* to be, but A *qua* beautiful, and this means loving A for what he *is*, in spite of what he may happen to be, or for the mode of his being what he is.” (Kosman, 1976:64)

Naturally, one may doubt whether it is possible to actually give reasons for interpersonal love, i.e. from one individual person directed at another individual. One may claim “No”:

Interpersonal love is simply a *brute fact*: Either A *loves* B, or A *does not*. In this conception of love, love is considered to be, say, like the hiccups: it’s just a phenomenon which occurs from time to time. One may give causal explanations, but not *reasons*. On the other hand, one may argue “Yes”; it *is* possible to give such reasons. Looking at Vlastos’ formulation “no reason is offered why we could love anyone except for what we could get out of him” (Vlastos, 1973:9), it seems that in Vlastos’ view, love is *not* a brute fact, as he seems to support the view that reasons *can* possibly be given.

For Vlastos, the right reason for loving is when the lover founds his love in consideration and respect for the beloved. However, this is in fact not a *reason* for loving someone. Showing consideration, care and respect for one’s beloved is an impact or effect of one’s love; from a moral perspective, perhaps even a legitimate demand in loving relationships. But it *cannot* be the reason for A loving B, unless one, as Vlastos seems to do, mixes up the conception of love and identifies it with other ones; e.g. care, respect, consideration (or other related concepts).¹⁹

Then we have the fear of exchange, which I take to be included in Vlastos’ position, or at least lurking in the background, as he does not mention it: For if the quality is seen to not necessarily have any connection to the individual, and it is rather the quality which is loveable, then the individual *itself* (“in its own uniqueness and integrity”) is not loved. Moreover, the quality, then, could possibly be found *elsewhere*, e.g. in other individuals who

¹⁸ Example used by Kosman, 1976:64. (Other predicates could have been applied, like money, influence, connections, political power, talent, etc.)

¹⁹ I shall give a more profound account of this objection towards Vlastos in section 3.3.

exhibit the same (or similar) quality. When Vlastos criticizes what he sees as a Platonic detachment between the individual and his/her “parts” (i.e. the individual’s qualities, properties, etc.), he requests love of the *whole* individual, in its uniqueness, and not just love of their *best* parts. According to Vlastos, seemingly, you have to love *the whole package*, every wart and wrinkle, or else it will fail to count as a real case of love. What Vlastos requires of a theory of love, then, is first 1) that an individual person shall be the object of love, but also 2) that the individual shall not simply be the object of love *per accidens*, but the love shall be directed toward the individual *qua that individual*, that real love shall “recognize the individual’s uniqueness”, and the individual will be loved for being *exactly* who he is. And indeed, there is something appealing about this demand; surely, the alternative, say, *love by accident*, (which perhaps corresponds better with the actual phenomenon), sounds less appealing and romantic than the kind of love Vlastos seems to demand.

Another way to look at “the fear of exchange” is the following: Full exchange is metaphysically impossible. One could argue that, for example, common history (i.e. common experiences and adventures, etc.), gives one’s lover (or past lover) a special kind of character/value which simply can’t be replaced or exchanged. Moreover: Suppose that “the lovers actually become similar, even indistinguishable in some respects” (Price, 1990:102); how could a new lover then exchange a previous?

2.3 Individuals as objects of change

I earlier made the claim that Vlastos mainly bases his conclusions on the speech of Diotima. Raphael Woolf justifies Vlastos on this point, as he too regards Diotima as the authoritative figure of the *Symposium*.²⁰ In Woolf’s account, the problem that Diotima (and hence perhaps Plato), has with the individual as a proper object of love, is in fact not so much “what it is” (*ti esti*), but individuals’ *changeability*. Woolf turns to Plato’s epistemology while exploring this problem, and proposes that individuals are not proper objects of love because they are not possible objects of *knowledge*. He argues that there is a necessary condition for a subject genuinely to love an object: The object of love must be known. Moreover, he argues that the depth of love is only possible with a proportionate depth of knowledge. The following problem then arises: Due to the arguments, in order to love an individual, you would first

²⁰ I was first introduced to Raphael Woolf’s syllogisms when he presented them in a talk he held at University of Oslo, as part of the *Oslo Happiness Project*. His paper has not yet been published, but he has made it available to me in the draft of the current version, and given me his permission to cite it as unpublished.

have to genuinely *know* that individual – but how can we claim to know something, or someone, if that x is constantly changing and therefore without a stable identity?

2.3.1 Knowability, changeability and loveability

Woolf has made the following syllogisms in order to clarify his arguments: Syllogism L (for *Loveability*):

L1: Only what is known can be a proper object of love

L2: Individuals cannot be known

L3: Individuals cannot be proper objects of love

Intuitively, we firstly question premise number 2, “individuals cannot be known”. To make this point clear, he offers another syllogism: Syllogism K (for *Knowledge*):

K1: What is constantly changing cannot be known

K2: Individuals are constantly changing

K3 (=L2): Individuals cannot be known

Note that in premise K1, an underlying Platonic premise is that we may only have belief, *doxa*, about things that are constantly changing, compared to knowledge, *episteme*, which we may have about unchangeable things.

At first glance, Woolf seems to be onto something when he relates this epistemic argument to the ontological aspect of the individual’s changeability, when writing upon Platonic love. Moreover, Woolf’s proposals seem plausible when it comes to how we understand our own conception of love. You might say that I can have a crush on a person B, although I have never spoken to B, but you would disagree if I claimed to *love* B without knowing B. And hence, if I loved someone, but then came to realize that I had a false view of that person, I might claim that I did not love that person after all, even if I previously thought I did. So how may I ever be sure that I know someone deeply enough to be sure that I love that someone? Moreover, *if* we are all continually changing, how can we demand lovers to, so to speak, “keep up” in knowing us and continue their loving?

A few sceptical questions to Woolf's view: Firstly, how does Woolf reach the conclusion that objects of love *must be known*, according to Diotima? Although she says that individuals do undergo change, and perhaps therefore cannot be known, she does not say explicitly that objects of love must be known. Secondly, it seems to me that Woolf fails to pay attention to the part in Diotima's speech where she speaks of love, of *eros*, as lack and need. Due to this, why could we not turn it around, arguing that L1) Only that which *never* can be *fully* known, (grasped, absorbed, possessed) can be objects of love, L2) Individuals cannot be fully known L3) Individuals can be objects of love? And thirdly, the passage in the dialogue *Cratylus* (439e–440a), which he turns to in justifying K1, is concerned about *things* and not individuals, which give me the impression that Woolf (like Vlastos, or so I shall argue), does not seem to care too much about the differences between regular *things* and individuals. And lastly, how are we to understand knowledge here? Maybe it is not the scientific kind of *knowledge* which Woolf seemingly insists which is required, but rather feelings of *intimacy*?

However, the questions above do not affect our problem with the individual's changeability. Therefore, in the following, I examine *in what sense* individuals are said to be objects of change.

2.3.2 Individuals as embodied souls

In the *Symposium*, “the body” is introduced by Aristophanes' problems with his uncontrollable bodily sounds: He gets a hiccup just as he is supposed to begin his speech, which in itself creates a comic backdrop for the comedy writer's speech. But I shall put Aristophanes “on hold” for now: In this section, my focus will be on whether the individual's changeability in body and mind/soul is of such a character that one is justly led towards the conclusion that this changeability is the reason individuals cannot be proper objects of love. As is well known, Plato operates with a distinction between the body and soul, in ancient Greek, *soma* and *psuche*. Although Plato, commonly held at least, had views on the soul which some of us “modern readers” may not share, in particular, perhaps, the immortality, pre-existence and afterlife of the soul, most of us consider the human psyche to be a somewhat different “part” than the rest of our bodily parts. As Burnyeat puts it, “we *are* so embodied, however that came about” (Burnyeat, 2006:7).

And our bodies (regrettably some may say) are objects of change. According to Woolf's syllogisms, we cannot love individuals, partly because of the fact that they are constantly

changing. Individuals are always *becoming*, always *coming to be*. How can we know a “thing” which never *is*? According to Aristotle, it was this kind of epistemological questions that led Plato to distinguish between the Ideas, the particular things and their characteristics.²¹ As mentioned, Plato never made the levels in his tripartite ontology fully clear – nor the relation between a substance and its properties. However, my focus is on the distinction “being/becoming”, as I take this to be the central distinction in Plato on this point, in contrast to Aristotle’s more detailed description of the distinction substance/accident.²²

But however changeable the bodies are, Plato often seems to show more concern for the soul than for our bodies; so what, then, about the soul – is the soul also changeable, and therefore, according to Woolf’s syllogisms, not loveable? In Diotima’s view, it is.

One is always becoming new, and in other respects perishing, in one’s hair, flesh, bones, blood and the whole body. And not just the body, but also in soul, one’s moods, character traits, beliefs, desires, pleasures, pains, fears, each of these never remains the same for each, but some are coming to be, other perishing. *Symp.* 207de

Her standpoint is that an individual’s body and soul always undergo change in some respect or other. This fits perfectly with what we are told in the *Theaetetus*: “There we are told that, when speaking of items of this kind [particular objects as opposed to the Ideas], it is simply incorrect to say that one of these items *is*. We should rather say that it *becomes*.” (Mann, 2000:85).

However, the view expressed by Diotima, that the soul is constantly changing, is not consistent with the traditional understanding of the Platonic view on the *soul*. Here the soul is an essential part of an individual – maybe even the most important aspect of an individual. According to Socrates in the *Republic*, the character and quality of the soul we are born with determines our lives. While some have souls of gold, others have souls of silver, etc. (*Rep.* 415b). Moreover, there is agreement on the “tripartition of the soul” (*Rep.* 440e), and the different ways in which souls can be proportioned in terms of reason (*to logistikon*), temper (*thumos*) and desire (*epithymia*).²³ In the *Phaedrus*, too, we find “proof” of the immortality of “all souls”, both human and divine (*Phdr.* 245c). Furthermore, souls are described as something that, in their pre-existence, participated in the world of Ideas. However, the clearest

²¹ C.f., e.g. McCabe (1994)

²² C.f., e.g., Wolfgang-Rainer Mann, *The Discovery of Things* (2000). Note that Eros is precisely described as *in between* of all “things”, most certainly also between *being* and *non-being* (c.f. section 1.3).

²³ *Thumos* is the most ambiguous of these three parts, and may be translated differently, but I believe “temper” is an accurate translation. For further reading on the tripartition of the soul, see for example Burnyeat’s well-known article “The Truth of Tripartition” (2006).

arguments “proving” the immortality of the soul are to be found in the *Phaedo*.²⁴ Recalling the question then; are souls objects of change? According to McCabe’s line of reasoning in the quote below, they are not objects of change – but only insofar as the souls are like the Ideas:

Souls are incomposite and invisible. Forms are incomposite and invisible. So souls are like Forms. But Forms are eternal because they are incomposite – they are thus not subject to change. Souls, therefore, insofar as they are incomposite, are not subject to change either. (McCabe, 1994:266)²⁵

If souls are like the Ideas, they cannot change. Recalling Vlastos’ criticism, then, that the Platonic lover does not love the individual *qua* that individual; do we solve this problem by arguing that souls are like the Ideas?

I will try to answer this question by first turning to another ancient scholar who points to Plato’s undermining of individuality, Hallvard Fossheim: “Plato’s undermining of individuality is perhaps most striking in the theory of *eros*.” (Fossheim 2010:50) According to Fossheim, this undermining is especially apparent in the erotic dialogue the *Phaedrus*. Fossheim argues that this dialogue is not, as is commonly held, a portrayal of individual souls’ struggle for salvation. What it is about, in Fossheim’s perspective, is *non-individuality*, as he argues that the soul, at least when it is in cosmic motion, i.e. in a pre- or post-existential state, must be seen as unitary (Fossheim, 2010:60).

When Fossheim states that “there are no individual souls in the *Phaedrus*” (Fossheim, 2010:52), this makes me wonder what function non-individuality has in Plato’s system: *If* Plato’s writings bear a somewhat flawed concept of individuality, how does this “lack” of individuality fit – or benefit – the rest of Plato’s system? One answer may be (as McCabe and Fossheim seem to be on to) that it serves the principle of the unity of the Ideas, which is a well known Platonic principle (although I have the impression that it is perhaps not a typical subject of discussion amongst scholars today).

Let’s say, then, that souls from Plato’s point of view have a similar ontological status to the Ideas, and that Diotima’s claim that souls are changeable does not merit authority. How does this affect Vlastos’ criticism that the individuals *qua* individuals will never be objects of love according to Plato? McCabe writes: “if souls are like Forms, they will be just one and not

²⁴ There are at least four proofs of the immortality of the soul in the *Phaedo*. (C.f., e.g. Kraggerud, 2001:15–16)

²⁵ Although McCabe writes “Forms”, I stick to my previous usage of the term “Ideas” in the following discussion.

many in any way” (McCabe, 1994:266). So if souls are ontologically similar to the Ideas, and the Ideas due to the principle of the unity in fact are one and not many, then souls would, likewise, be one and not many, and (this is the crux of the argument) hence devoid of individuality. To argue that souls are like Ideas, then, would therefore not solve our problem. Vlastos’ argument that Plato fails to value individuality, and that the Platonic lover does not love the individual *qua* that individual, still stands, and has perhaps even been strengthened.

Reading the *Pheadrus* and Fossheim’s interpretation of it, one is left with the inevitable impression that the dialogue does not provide clear evidence for believing that souls have individuality. Indeed, Plato does not offer any guarantees on this matter, we are left in puzzlement. However, the suggested relation between the souls and Ideas points to a paradox: one of the reasons, I think, we want souls (such as Socrates’ soul) to be immortal is precisely because they are, or have, individuality. Moreover, if souls are immutable, like Ideas, then there will be no reasons for virtue ethics. But “ethics is not the only baby to go out with this bathwater” (McCabe, 1994:267). For “to argue that souls survive because they are incomposite [like the Ideas] gives us no consolation for dying” (McCabe, 1994:267), as a person’s soul, *as we know and love it*, will actually not survive death. The reason *not* to be sad when Socrates drinks the hemlock, if souls lack individuality, thus vanishes. These things considered, I am not convinced that the souls actually *are* like the Ideas, as this would, as shown, have major consequences for Plato’s philosophy.

Interestingly, though, if one is to say that according to Plato, the soul is *not* changeable (regardless of how one would justify this statement), it might follow that the individual *is* knowable, and hence loveable according to the syllogisms, after all. In fact, if we take another look at what Diotima thought were objects of change within the soul, we see that all of the things she mentions are qualities that *someone has*. She says that (some) one’s “moods, pleasures, pains”, etc., are objects of change (*Symp.* 207de), and *not* that the *one* is continually changing. Then what about the *one* who constitutes the *someone*, or so to speak, the “I” who creates the “me”?

Naturally, we *do* change in body as well as in our “souls/minds”; we become older, more experienced, we take choices, want to improve ourselves, and so on. Nevertheless, do we have good reasons for believing that Plato rejected the idea that there is a more stable self, “I”, who may claim that “at that point in my life I decided to change”? If Woolf is right in his syllogisms, Plato would have to reject any stability of the self. Moreover, unlike things such

as “wooden horses” (using an example from Plato’s *Theaetetus*), individual persons are active as they *do* things on their own, they think, believe, desire, judge and make decisions. It strikes me as dubious that Plato, as an ancient thinker in an agent-concerned tradition in philosophy, would hold that every, if any change that the agent’s mind is going through is totally beyond the agent’s control.

Therefore I have to conclude that individual persons as “objects of change” seem to be in a special position: On the one hand they are always in some aspect of *becoming*, yet there is always *someone* who becomes, and therefore to some extent *is*, in the sense of *being*.²⁶

2.4 Alcibiades’ and Aristophanes’ approach

One way of responding to Vlastos’ conclusion is of course to argue that he is wrong, that the individual, in its uniqueness and wholeness, in fact *is* a proper object of love in Plato’s theory of love. Without explicitly arguing that Vlastos is *wrong* (yet nearly), Nussbaum offers an alternative way of interpreting the *Symposium* by highlighting speeches which Vlastos hardly pays attention to, in particular the ones delivered by Alcibiades and Aristophanes. As mentioned, determining “what Plato meant” always needs discussions including other perspectives than those given by Socrates, as treating Socrates as Plato’s mouthpiece is not sufficient. So what do Alcibiades and Aristophanes have to offer on our subject, “love and the Individual”? I start with Alcibiades’ speech, before turning to Aristophanes’.

Nussbaum holds that Alcibiades’ speech deserves a more privileged position than Vlastos is willing to concede, and that we should look carefully into this speech before we draw conclusions similar to Vlastos’. It is the last speech in the *Symposium*; furthermore, it represents an alternative to Diotima’s descriptions of love. We should not overlook Alcibiades’ words just because he is a bit groggy, she writes, with reference to the old saying *in vino veritas*. Alcibiades states: “Know well that none of you know this man [Socrates]” (*Symp.*216c–d). Is this not a peculiar thing to say, when everyone at Agathon’s party seems to know Socrates? Is this said in order to underscore that which Woolf sees as a fact, that “the individual cannot be known”, or does this line underscore that two lovers are intimate in a special way, a way that makes it natural to say “none of you [*others*] know this man [the way *I* do]”?

²⁶ C.f. the previously stated ontological distinction between *being* and *becoming*.

Moreover, Alcibiades focuses on the stability in Socrates' soul:

When he is serious and opens up I do not know if anyone has seen the treasures within; but I once saw them and they seemed to me divine and golden and utterly beautiful and wondrous, so that in short I had to do whatever Socrates bid (*Symp.* 216e–217a).

Divine and golden, Alcibiades says. Following up on the discussion of the individual's changeability – are not these symbols of precisely unchangeable – and then, according to Woolf's syllogisms, knowable things? And although we have the impression that it has been a while since Alcibiades actually saw "the treasures within", he does not seem to consider that Socrates' soul might have changed. Moreover, Alcibiades says that what he loves the most is precisely Socrates' uniqueness, his individuality: "When it comes to the peculiarity of the man's [Socrates] character... you would not find anyone else who comes near, either among his contemporaries or those of the past" (*Symp.* 221d).

It seems to me that Alcibiades feels a purely personal love for Socrates. This is not honourable "philosophical love" – Socrates has told Alcibiades the "beautiful words", but Alcibiades is rather resistant to these words. He does not love Socrates for the sake of something else, "He [Alcibiades] has no desire whatsoever to transcend what Diotima scorns as *mortal trash*" (Hobbs, 2000:258; *Symp.* 211e). Hence, Alcibiades refuses to go up the ladder, and perhaps precisely therefore, Socrates keeps on rejecting him at every turn.²⁷ In Nussbaum's opinion, the refusing Alcibiades then represents an alternative to Socratic love. She argues that Alcibiades regards interpersonal love as something valuable in itself, with its base in precisely intimacy (*not* knowability):

With his [Alcibiades] claims that a story tells the truth and that his goal is to open up and to know, he suggests that the lover's knowledge of the particular other, gained through an intimacy both bodily and intellectual, is itself a unique and uniquely valuable *kind* of practical understanding, and one that we risk losing if we take the first step up the Socratic ladder. (Nussbaum, 2007:190)

As an alternative, then, to the focus on general qualities, we thus have Alcibiades, who tries to pull our focus towards the particulars. On Nussbaum's account, "He [Alcibiades] cannot describe the passion or its object [Socrates] in general terms (...) The entire speech is an attempt to communicate that uniqueness." (Nussbaum, 2007:187)

I now turn to Vlastos' demand of love for the *whole* individual. In Vlastos' understanding, Platonic love must be directed toward the good, in analogy with Diotima's statement "Love is not for the half or the whole of anything, unless, my friend, that half or whole happens to be

²⁷ I return to Socrates' rejection of Alcibiades in section 4.1.

good.” (*Symp.* 205e) And, “as Vlastos remarks, any whole person has uglinesses and faults. To avoid love being directed at ugliness, love must be directed at a property of the person, not the whole.” (Nussbaum, 2007:178) This is what Vlastos bases his conclusion on, when saying that the individual, in its uniqueness and wholeness, will never be a proper object of Platonic love.

“It is not surprising that love, like other concepts which seem to have their first home in individual and personal contexts, should have assumed for Plato cosmic and mythic proportions.” (Kosman, 1976:53) Whereas Alcibiades’ speech, as shown, focuses on his concrete and personal love of Socrates, comedy writer Aristophanes’ speech is more cosmic and mythic in nature. However, regarding Vlastos’ demand for love of the individual in its uniqueness and wholeness, Nussbaum also turns to the speech delivered by Aristophanes, arguing that much of what Vlastos seems to want from an account of love is in fact to be found here (Nussbaum, 2007:173,174), more precisely in the myth he tells about Human Nature (*Symp.* 189d–193b): In the beginning, there were three kinds of human beings. In addition to female and male, there was a combination of those two. These creatures were completely round, they had four hands, as many legs as hands, two faces and two sets of sexual organs. But Zeus had to cut them in two, since they represented a threat to the Gods. Now, since their natural form had been cut in two, each one longed for its own other half; desperately they tried to throw their arms around each other, they would not do anything apart from each other. To cut the myth short; long ago humans were united, now they are separated, and they are continuously in search of their other “half”. Aristophanes was thus perhaps the first to introduce the romantic view that for each there is “one other half” (*Symp.* 191a; 192b), as he here introduced the idea of the lover’s incompleteness.²⁸

In her reading of Aristophanes’ double-people theory, Nussbaum observes that: “The objects of these creatures’ passions are whole people; not ‘complexes of desirable qualities’, but entire beings, thoroughly embodied, with all their idiosyncrasies, flaws, and even faults.” (Nussbaum, 2007:173) What makes them fall in love is feelings of intimacy, ontological incompleteness and the “astonishment of finding in a supposed stranger a deep part of your own being” (Nussbaum, 2007:173; *Symp.* 192b–c). They “search” and “come together”,

²⁸ I discuss the implications of this idea in the next chapter, in section 3.1, 3.4 and especially 3.5.

trying to find their other half, although it is not really in their power to ensure a successful reunion. And, however often they may enter one another's bodies, they are never becoming "one", but are always remaining two individuals with different beliefs, desires and imaginings. In this myth, then, the individual is loved not only as a *whole*, but also as unique and irreplaceable.²⁹ Summing up: "Aristophanes seems to capture the uniqueness, as well as the wholeness, that Vlastos found lacking in Plato's view" on love (Nussbaum, 2007:174).

Naturally, Vlastos *had* read Aristophanes' speech. But instead of using Aristophanes' speech as a foundation for arguing that Plato in fact recognized individual persons as unique individuals and proper objects of love, Vlastos uses Aristophanes' speech against Plato:

We are prey to this error [this searching for our "other half"], Plato would say, because of our carnal condition, burdened with incompleteness which fellow-creatures have power to complete; were we free of mortal deficiency we would have no reason to love anyone or anything except the Idea: seen face to face, it would absorb all our love. (Vlastos, 1973:32).

The only place in his article that he explicitly mentions Aristophanes' speech is in a footnote to this passage. Alcibiades, too, is mentioned only once, in a footnote – his speech is not discussed at all.

Perhaps Vlastos is right in saying that if seen face to face, the Idea would absorb all our love. But we will never, in our bodily existence in any case, see the pure Idea face to face: Both Vlastos and Plato agree to this. As stated earlier, Vlastos argues that what the Platonic lover really loves is the Idea, and the quote above underscores this. We may therefore once again ask the question: *What does it mean to love an Idea?*³⁰ What does Vlastos think it means, and how should one understand the three levels in Plato's ontology, which Vlastos outlined and I discussed in the beginning of this chapter? An Idea, in Vlastos' perspective, seems to be a mysterious "thing" of higher rank. But could not *to love the Idea*, for example, the Idea of Beauty, mean to love *the realization of beauty*, in Plato's way of thinking, *the realization of beauty in individual persons' souls, one's own as well as others*?³¹

²⁹ Unfortunately, the myth does not say *how* one is to go about finding this other half, "it is hard to see what reason and planning can do to make that half turn up." (Nussbaum, 2007:174).

³⁰ See footnote no. 15, p.12

³¹ I return to this argument, briefly in section 3.2, and more profoundly in chapter 5.

2.5 Concluding remarks

Socrates: Well, then, what is a human being? Alcibiades: I don't know what to say. *Alcibiades*, 129e.

It strikes me that Vlastos overlooks Alcibiades' speech, perhaps because he sees him merely as a clown who lacks understanding of Socrates' fine words. In the other corner, we have Nussbaum's sympathetic reading, picturing an Alcibiades who desperately tries to have an impact on Socrates. Moreover, she argues that Alcibiades by his approach to Socrates in fact points out crucial aspects of love which are lacking in Socrates' account. Whether Plato by Alcibiades' tribute to Socrates underscores Socrates' authority and wisdom on the subject of *ta erotika*, or rather tries to show another, competitive and "empirical" truth about love, we cannot know for sure. In any case, we should not ignore that *if* we give more authority to Alcibiades, or to the speech delivered by Aristophanes, we may reach a different answer as to how Plato views the individual. The individual seems much less redundant in Aristophanes' view, and far more valuable in Alcibiades' perspective, than in the eyes of Diotima/Socrates. I think that Vlastos and other interpreters who simply believe Alcibiades is a portrait of someone who notoriously misunderstands, and Aristophanes of solely a vulgar comedian, by such selective focus are in danger of overlooking crucial Platonic perspectives.

Vlastos argued that Plato always gives the Ideas preeminence.³² However, I am far from convinced that Plato, who is obviously fascinated by individual persons, their differences and different perspectives, is more interested in the theory of the Ideas than in individuals. Could one not "classically" argue that it is *the other way around*, that it is the theory of the Ideas that, in the end, is instrumental in individuals' understanding of their existence on earth and what the *eudaimon*-life consists in? If so, then it would be strange to hold that Plato values the Ideas more than he values individuals.

As discussed, the relation between the individual and his/her properties and existential parts clearly provides problems in matters of love. Moreover, individual persons, in their embodied existence, will in comparison with individual objects, to some extent at least, share similar difficulties, concerning (self-) identification, changeability and persistence over time.³³ (I.e.; is this the amazing genius I met yesterday?)

³² C.f., p.11

³³ Cf., e.g., McCabe (1994)

As previously stated, I think readers of Plato should be careful not to apply passages written about “things” when trying to make statements regarding Plato’s view on individual persons. In Plato’s account, individuals are certainly trickier, ontologically that is. For whereas the Ideas are correspondingly ontologically pure, individuals’ ontology is *mixed* (*Phaedo* 78–102), in a way which not only makes them differ from the Ideas, but also solely from material objects. My perception is that Vlastos fails to recognize this, fails to recognize the distinction between being “someone” and “something”. To love a “thing” and to love an individual person seems, in Vlastos’ treatment of the individual as an object of love in Plato, to be ontologically the same. And an application of Plato’s conception of individual objects *mutatis mutandis* to individual persons is, from my point of view, unsatisfying, as to employ a cliché, being “something” is easier than being “someone”. There seems to be something special about the *I* which, at least partly, constitutes the *me*.³⁴ Vlastos’ account of the individual as an object of love would perhaps be more convincing if he had been more nuanced considering these aspects.

Moreover, it strikes me that Vlastos seemingly has a quite static conception of “the individual”: *This individual person is exactly the way he/she is, and must be loved in the integrity and wholeness of his/her uniqueness*. As if, then, individual persons were already accomplished entities. He thus fails to recognize individual persons as subjects, as active, concerned and aware of themselves and others, especially those they love (or so I shall argue in the next chapter). Moreover, Vlastos fails take in the meaning of Plato’s pivotal ontological distinction between *being/becoming*, and individual persons’ special position in relation to this.

Nevertheless, I agree with Vlastos in what seems to be his line of thought, that: *If* individuals are beautiful because they all participate in the *single source* of Beauty itself, it is inevitable that they all have to be beautiful in the *same way*, and if what we really love is the general quality of beauty, then the individual is not loved in its “uniqueness”. However, I also believe one may argue in line with Nussbaum, arguing that both the lover and the beloved may participate in the Idea of Beauty, yet still have different kinds of beauty: “Alcibiades lacks *that* beauty – [but he does not necessarily lack] *all* beauty. He might have some other type of beauty. Or he might have some other token of the same type.” (Nussbaum, 2007:178).

³⁴ Cf., e.g., Moran (2001)

However, if individuals incorporate valuable and pursued qualities with their source in the Ideas, thus they still have some kind of connection to the Idea, which seemingly makes them suitable as instrumental “steps” towards the final love. “The ladder of rational erotics” seems to support this view, as it plays a critical part in drawing lovers from particulars towards the Form of Goodness and Beauty itself – and it is a fact that individual persons here are used as examples (*Symp.* 210c). This said, *how* the lover uses the beloved as “steps” is not yet explored, and this seems to me to be a crucial point when judging Plato’s theory of love. I examine this in the next chapter.

However, regarding other aspects of Vlastos’ argumentation, I suppose one could argue against him, in saying that: Even if individuals were to be loved for a quality that can be found elsewhere; *so what?* Naturally, the thought of this is not appealing, but to what extent may I (or Vlastos) legitimately criticize Plato’s theory of love for not taking the “pleasing” of individuals into account? Perhaps Vlastos, falsely, exaggerates the importance of loving the individual in “the integrity of its own uniqueness”?

I am also inclined, like Kosman, to believe that a combination of the two statements “we really love the pursued qualities” and “we love the unique individual” in fact is possible, and that this does not need to involve detachment of the qualities from the individual: It is true that I love the qualities, which are incorporated in him, and therefore I love the “placeholder” of these qualities. It is precisely the *placeholder*, the “bearer”, whom I love: Thus I might add that I love this placeholder in his own integrity, and in his uniqueness, his special constitution of qualities, which makes him an irreplaceable individual.

In this chapter I have discussed the relation between the Ideas and individual persons, and Vlastos’ perception of this. And we have seen that when it comes to Plato’s theory of love, Vlastos holds that within this theory, the beloved individual becomes a “place-holder”. This leads not only to his perception that the individual is redundant in Plato’s theory of love, but also to his charge that Plato’s theory of love is *essentially egoistic*: This will be our subject of examination in the next chapter.

3 Eudaimonic Love and Egoism

Vlastos' Second Charge; The Charge of Egoism:

This is straightforward utility-love: the doctor, the rich, the wise are loved by one who needs them for what *he* can get out of them, and no reason is offered why we could love anyone except for what we could get out of him. The egoistic perspective of “love” so conceived becomes unmistakable when Socrates, generalizing, argues that “if one were in want of nothing, one would feel no affection, ... and he who felt no affection would not love.” The lover Socrates has in view seems positively incapable of loving others for their own sake, else why must he feel no affection for anyone whose good-producing qualities *he* did not happen to need? (Vlastos, 1973:9)³⁵

Vlastos writes this while discussing the *Lysis*. But he does not retract it, as he goes on, so we have no reason to believe that he feels differently than how he here expresses himself. Being self-centered, inviting to reflections upon one's life and the way it is going, Plato's eudaimonistic ethics, and perhaps especially his theory of love, may be viewed as egoistic, i.e. as only seeking the best for one self. Vlastos argues that within Plato's theory of love, the lover loves only that which, in the end, will contribute to the lover's own happiness. He also states that the lover Socrates has in mind seems positively incapable of loving others for their own sake. Vlastos thus establishes an opposition between A) *love for the lover's own sake* and B) *love for the beloved's sake alone*. The beloved, Vlastos argues, is in Plato's theory “bypassed”, so to speak, and moreover, Plato's account of love proclaims “straightforward utility-love”. Vlastos thereby draws the conclusion that Plato's theory of love is essentially egoistic and selfish.

What makes Vlastos require that proper love must be for the beloved's sake, and *independent* of one's own happiness – and to what extent is he entitled to do so? In exploring these questions, I begin with an analysis of Vlastos' interpretation of Socrates' practices in the *Lysis*, thereafter I turn to the mysterious *proton philon*, love's first and final object. To my mind, Vlastos' Kantian propensities become particularly clear in his judging of this dialogue. An illustrating comparison of *eudaimonism* with (Vlastosian) Kantianism will therefore be given. Then I turn to the discussion of egoism versus “self-love”, before lastly connecting the discussion to the Greek terms *endeeis* and *phusei oikeion*.

³⁵ As in the previous chapter, this quote will be used as the focus of discussion.

3.1 Is Lysis unloved?

What Socrates says of their [the parents] love for the boy [Lysis] would have been perfectly true even if they had happened to be arrant egoists who wanted their son to be sensible and well-behaved only because of the trouble this would spare them and the credit it would bring them. So egoistic love is not excluded though, so far, neither is it implied. But as we go on reading the dialogue we find that it is implied, in effect, after all. This happens when Socrates goes on to argue that if A loves B, he does so because of some benefit *he* needs from B and for the sake of just that benefit. (Vlastos, 1973:8)

Vlastos never explicitly states that Lysis' parents do not love their son. But, according to Vlastos, the egoistic perspective becomes "unmistakable" when Socrates, in Vlastos' words, "goes on to argue that if A loves B, he does so because of some benefit he needs from B and for the sake of just that benefit" (Vlastos, 1973:8; *Lys.* 213e ff.). In Vlastos' view, Plato offers no reason for why we could love anyone except for what we could get out of him (Vlastos, 1973:8). I am thus inclined to believe that in Vlastos' perception, Lysis is, after all, unloved by his parents. In the following I discuss whether Lysis really is unloved. Our main question is: "Does this criticism treat the *Lysis* fairly, or is it a typical instance of moralism setting up its own target?" (Price, 1990:2)

Vlastos connects his criticism of the *Lysis* to his reading of the *Republic*, arguing that both dialogues exaggerate the concept of "usefulness". The way Vlastos reads the *Republic*, a "useless" individual person may claim absolutely nothing – because individuals are only to be valued for their functioning and productiveness (Vlastos, 1973:15–16), i.e. only insofar as they contribute to the ideal state. Due to the argument of *ergon* ("function") which is highlighted in the *Republic*, each person should do what *that person is most suited for*, so that he is of most use. The ideal state is described in terms of a *corpus*, an organic entity, in which all "parts" must work together as a whole, pursuing and finding pleasure in the same things. In addition, the arguments of functioning and usefulness are taken to another level as human sexuality is described in terms of breeding (*Rep.* 468c), in order to breed forth qualities of the best men and women; "exclusive" love between single persons, especially love between the sexes and parental love, seems thus to be excluded. This leads to another statement from Vlastos: That Plato disregards personal desire and affection, and thinks that privatization of feelings would disrupt the community as a "family" where everyone is everyone's *kin* and *philoï* (Vlastos, 1973:12). With this interpretation of the *Republic*, Vlastos argues that there is a perfect correlation between the *Republic* and the *Lysis* (Vlastos, 1973:13).

But let us focus on the *Lysis*. This dialogue is one of Plato's earlier dialogues. The dialogue is short, and, at least at first glance, it comes across as less impressive than Plato's far more famous dialogues, such as the *Republic* and the *Symposium*. In the *Lysis*, we are offered what may seem like a "trivial" discussion about love, wrapped up in what may be seen (at least by modern readers) as superficial sayings, like "God always draws the like unto the like" (*Lys.* 214a), which in turn is refuted by another saying that similarity is ground of enmity: "Potter is angry with potter, poet with poet, and beggar with beggar" (*Lys.* 215c).³⁶ Interpreters have even doubted that this dialogue was written by Plato, "how could Plato have written such a philosophical failure?" I think it is important to keep in mind the fact that Socrates in this dialogue engages in conversations with good-looking *teenage boys*, and not, say, Parmenides or Gorgias. What if the "fiasco" is a mask, a Platonic intended disguise?

In this dialogue, Socrates shows the boy Hippothales, who is in love with the slightly younger Lysis, how to talk to a beloved. Socrates advises Hippothales to stop singing out how lovely he thinks the boy he loves is: If he continues to do this, then the boy will become "swell-headed and harder to catch"; Swell-headed; as in thinking oneself to be self-sufficient and in lack of nothing. A hunter that scares off his game and makes it more difficult to catch is indeed a poor hunter, Socrates argues (*Lys.* 206a). Socrates offers his expertise: "if you're willing to have him talk with me, I might be able to give you a demonstration of how to carry on a discussion with him" (*Lys.* 206c).

Instead of praising the boy Lysis, Socrates' pronounced project is to show Hippothales how to *humble* Lysis; as Socrates says in the end, "This is how you should talk to your boyfriends, Hippothales, making them humble and drawing in their sails, instead of swelling them up and spoiling them, as you do" (*Lys.* 210e). The "humbling" of Lysis would then, from my point of view, consist in making him realize his need, i.e. his lack of self-sufficiency. Vlastos does not pay attention to this premise of the dialogue. In my opinion, we ought to take this setting into account when judging Socrates' words, as we are more or less told that Socrates shall bamboozle Lysis into *thinking* that he is unloved.

In the discussion with Lysis, Socrates attempts to persuade him into believing certain (rather childish) conceptions of happiness and love; like "loving people is letting them do whatever they want", and that "happiness is a matter of doing what one wants". Therefore, "people love

³⁶ The first saying is from Homer, the *Odyssey* xvii.218, and the second from Hesiod, *Work and Days* 25–26. (C.f., Cooper, 1997:698–699)

you if they let you do whatever you want, because loving people is wanting them to be happy, and being happy is doing what you want” (Penner & Rowe, 2005:31). Socrates then asks Lysis whether his parents, who claim to love him, let him do whatever makes him happy. “No”, Lysis answers, and tells Socrates that there are in fact many things they do not let him do: In fact, a slave is in charge of him, while his parents are not present. So even though the parents say they love him, and that they want him to be happy, they do not seem to trust him enough to let him “be free”, let him do the things he want. And as you might suppose then, in Socrates’ provocative words, they “prevent you from being happy and doing what you like” (Lys. 208e), which, according to the arguments given above, leads to the conclusion that they do *not* seem to love their son, after all.

What started off as a discussion of how to talk to lovely boys has now, as we see, turned into a discussion on parental love. The question is: Why would Lysis’ parents prevent him from doing whatever he wants? As Lysis says, his parents allow him certain things. Socrates then asks (ironically, I might add): “What on earth, then, Lysis, would the reason be that in these cases they don’t prevent you, whereas in the cases we were talking about just now, they do stop you?” (Lys. 209b–c). Lysis answers that he imagines his parents allow him to do things he knows, and stop him from doing things he does not know. Now Socrates states not only that they only let Lysis do what he wants when he has the *right knowledge*; but moreover, that they only love him when he *has* that knowledge: “if you become wise, my boy, then everyone will be your friend, everybody will feel close to you, because you will be useful and good. If you don’t become wise, though, nobody will be your friend, not even your father or mother or your close relatives” (Lys. 210d). With Lysis’ young age taken into account, I think it is fair to say that at the time Socrates uttered these words, Lysis was not very wise; therefore, taken literally, Socrates words would mean that at this stage in Lysis’ life, no one really loves him much.³⁷ And that is, as we know, exactly what Socrates wants Lysis to believe (at least at this point of their conversation.)

During their conversation Socrates suggests that perhaps they have looked at things in completely the wrong way, and that if they had looked at things in the right way, they would not have been “so far off course” (Lys. 213de); moreover, in the dialogue’s last line Socrates states that “what a friend is we have not yet been able to find out.” (Lys.223b) Thus it looks like they have now given up understanding the nature of *philia*. So Lysis is left puzzled, and

³⁷ C.f., e.g. Price (1990)

the dialogue as well, as it ends without a clear conclusion, in *aporia* – or so it *seems*.

Summing up: knowledge makes you useful, knowledge is therefore one way to become loved, c.f., you're only loved insofar as you're useful. Vlastos follows the argument thus far – where, then, does he get lost? Correctly, Socrates does state that “so it turns out that your father does not love you, nor does anyone love anyone else, so far as that person is useless.” (*Lys.*210c) I am inclined to believe that Vlastos here takes Socrates' formal conclusion *literally*, and that he is wrong in doing so, as it is obvious that Lysis' father *does* love him, and that this would be the case even if Lysis was of no use.

My point is that there is another way to look at this, one which Vlastos fails to see. The practical outcome of the arguments given is that Lysis needs to acquire knowledge. His parents too, it seems, want him to acquire knowledge. But why? They want him to acquire knowledge because benefits and happiness depend on it. One could say then, I suppose, that the “true” Socratic lesson here is that in loving someone one wants them to be wise, because this is the best way for the beloved to have a chance to procure benefits and become happy.³⁸ If the proposed connection between benefits, love, happiness and knowledge is true (which I believe is accurate, and I think Plato would agree to this), Lysis' parents have not acted in any way which entails that they do not love their son.

All things considered, there is no reason why we should believe that Socrates himself supported the childish conceptions of happiness and love which he first introduced. Thus we ought to reject the conclusion that Lysis' parents don't love him, as well as the claim which Vlastos holds on to, that one person is loved only insofar as that person is “useful” – a claim even the teenage boy Lysis doubts.

Such is my impression of the discussion of whether Lysis is loved or not. However, there are still many questions left unanswered: What did Socrates mean when he said that if you become wise, then everyone will be your friend and “everyone will feel close to you”?³⁹ And to what extent may Lysis' parents be said to love their son *for his own sake*, in fact, what does this “Vlastosian” phrase mean, *love for the beloved's own sake*? These questions require a more profound investigation. But first, regardless of for whose sake and how love is manifested, *why* would we love anything? What is love's final end?

³⁸ My argumentation on this point is in line with Penner and Rowe's (Penner & Rowe, 2005:33)

³⁹ See quote p. 31.

3.2 The mysterious *proton philon*

With reference to Socrates' examples, Vlastos argued that Platonic love is based on utility – indeed, as far as the sick man loves his doctor, *it is* straightforward-utility love. However, we do not have to be “morally troubled” by this, as Vlastos seemingly is. For we must remember that although “utility-friendship” is to us a paradox; ‘utility-*philia*’ will be one of Aristotle’s categories” (Price, 1990:11). On Aristotle’s account, and Plato’s I believe, this kind of love is just *one* among other kinds of love.⁴⁰ Vlastos overlooks this, which is rather strange. Now, is there something which we do *not* love for the sake of something else?

Vlastos refers to Socrates' examples while arguing that the lover A only loves the beloved B for a benefit A needs from B: The sick man loves his doctor for the sake of health; the poor love the wealthy and the weak love the strong for the sake of advantageous aid (*Lys.* 218 ff.) However, “Whenever A chooses *x*, his choice of *x* must be explained by his choice of some end – he chooses *x* for the sake of *y*; but his choice of *y* must in turn be explained by some further end, his choice of *z*...and so on.” (Irwin, 1977:51) Clearly, this process cannot continue forever. We are now entering the discussion of the *proton philon*, love’s first and final object that we must recognize as an object of desire, not desired for any further end. In the *Lysis*, we find the following question: “Don’t we have to arrive at some first principle which no longer brings us back to another friend, something that goes back to the first friend, something for the sake of which we say that all the rest are friends too?” (*Lys.* 219d)⁴¹ To this they agree; there *must* be such a first principle, a *proton philon*. The *proton philon* is the true object of love, what we really and finally love; moreover, it is that in which we love all other things. Perhaps more precisely; the *proton philon* is what we *should* love.

Regarding the individual as an “object of love”, then, the urgent question is whether an individual can be accorded the status of *proton philon*. On this point, Vlastos writes that “unless a man we loved actually *was* this *proton philon*, it would be a mistake to love him ‘for his own sake’ to treat him, in Kant’s phrase, as ‘an end in himself’.” (Vlastos, 1973:10) As we know, Vlastos concludes in the negative: No man, no individual person, can be given the status of *proton philon*.

⁴⁰ I return to the different accounts of love in section 4.2.

⁴¹ In Vlastos’ translation, “friend” in the quote above is exchanged with “object of love” (Vlastos, 1973:10)

What is it then, this mysterious *proton philon*? In seeking an answer to this question, Vlastos offers three possibilities: (1) The Beautiful in itself: As previously discussed, Vlastos argues that if one loves a person for his beauty, then it is, strictly speaking, *the beauty* that is the object of love, *not* the individual (c.f. section 2.1). Moreover, he argues that individuals cannot be proper objects of Platonic love partly because they will never be *purely* beautiful (c.f. section 2.4). However, Diotima seems to deny that Beauty is the *telos* of love when she rebukes Socrates: “What love wants is not beauty, as you think it is” (*Symp.* 206e). So beauty alone is *not* to be accorded the status of *proton philon* in Platonic love.

Vlastos then eventually writes that (2) “all Socrates is prepared to say is that it is ‘the good’” (Vlastos, 1973:10). Which is true, although I would not have chosen the word “prepared”: Like previously argued, I think we should keep in mind that Socrates is here talking to young boys – perhaps this may be seen as a reason why Socrates does not go into details about what the *proton philon* consists of? However, I understand why Vlastos takes the definition of the *proton philon* as “the good” to be imprecise and unsatisfying. In order to find a more detailed answer to what the *proton philon* is, Vlastos turns once again to the *Republic*, more precisely the latter part of Book V where we are introduced to the theory of the Ideas. Vlastos then states that: (3) “In the *Republic* we could have inferred that now the *proton philon* is the Idea.” (Vlastos, 1973:20) For Vlastos, this adds up to his perception that what the Platonic lover really loves is the Idea. However, to my mind, this is still a quite vague answer.

I believe we may have better luck in finding a detailed answer by returning to the *Symposium* instead. In Socrates’ and Diotima’s discussion, they conclude that “love is wanting to possess forever” (*Symp.* 206a), and that the way lovers pursue this is by “giving birth in beauty” (*Symp.* 206b), *tokos en kaloi*. When Diotima rhetorically asks herself *why reproduction*, she answers:

Because reproduction goes on forever; it is what mortals have in place of immortality. A lover must desire immortality along with the good, if what we agreed earlier was right, that Love wants to possess the good forever. It follows from our argument that Love must desire immortality. *Symp.* 206e–207a

According to Diotima, immortality is impossible for humankind, but, as Hobbs writes:

..she [Diotima] argues that humans can and do pursue three different kinds of substitute "immortality"(...)these are biological offspring, fame for noble deeds, and the creation of artistic, legislative, educative and philosophical works. (Hobbs, 2000:251)⁴²

The best kind of love, according to Diotima, is the latter which also has the highest degree of duration; that which gives birth to the creation of "wisdom and the rest of virtue" (*Symp.* 209b). A life consisting of running after one's other half, using Aristophanes' words, does not seem to be a good life, perhaps not even a livable one. We must find another way, "Instead of flesh and all that mortal rubbish, an immortal object must, and therefore can, be found" (Nussbaum, 2007:183). The culmination in birth fits perfectly with the notion of *eros* as lack and need, the continuous becoming of something new and yet unfulfilled, which, according to Diotima, represents an impersonal immortality. To employ a cliché, love is thus described as "a never ending love story". Instead of love for a single body and spirit, we need to reveal which substitutes of immortality are worth pursuing, in other words, as I take it, which values to pursue. After discovering which values to pursue, we strive for these values and try to *reproduce* them, to *realize* them, in our own soul as well as in others', in order to make our life as *good* as possible. In the end, then, what we all strive for is the good life, a life lived in *eudaimonia*: happiness.

"There's no reason to ask further, 'What's the point of wanting happiness?'...every desire for good things or for happiness is 'the supreme and treacherous love' in everyone" (*Symp.* 205a–d). We do not strive for happiness because of something that would follow from it; happiness is our final end, no matter how imprecise our notion of happiness may be.⁴³ Love's *proton philon*, love's first principle yet also the *telos* (end, purpose, goal) of it, then, is "eudaimon-happiness": the connection between happiness and love cannot be overrated.

"Socrates seems to assume that it is some kind of psychological fact that everyone pursues happiness." (Irwin, 1977:263)⁴⁴ Although Socrates then has to face the problems of what we may call "psychological egoism", (and clearly, it is not too difficult to come up with empirical counter-examples here), it strikes me how well Socrates' assumptions fits with modern

⁴² In Hobbs' account, these three pursuits may be seen in relation to the tripartition of the soul outlined in the *Republic*, as the three of them seem to correspond to the pursuits of appetites, *thumos* and reason (Hobbs, 2000:251).

⁴³ That happiness is what we all want, in the end, and want for its own sake, is also stated in the *Euthydemus*, (*Ethd.* 278e, 280b and 282a).

⁴⁴ The ethical implications of "psychological egoism" is, according to Irwin, most clearly drawn in the *Meno*, where it is said that a man's virtue must be beneficial to himself, and in the *Republic*, when they all agree that if justice is a virtue it must contribute to the just man's happiness (Irwin, 1977:255).

perspectives, as *most* modern people, I believe, either through careful deliberation or even quite unreflectively and unconsciously, use *precisely* happiness as the reason for desiring or loving something/someone (i.e. I love A because A makes me happy).

Summing up, then, it seems to me that love (*eros*) refers not (or *not just*) to love for individual persons, but more generally to our pursuit of good things, such as wisdom – things which are necessary in order to live a life in *eudaimonia*. On this point then, I agree with Sheffield:

For if happiness is the aim of *eros*, and our pursuit of beauty is determined by that aim, it is not just a semantic confusion to think that *eros* centrally refers to love for individuals, but a deeply misguided idea to think that a person or persons can satisfy our aspiration for good things and happiness, or that they are proper objects of *eros*. Only the most committed romantic would entertain such an idea. (Sheffield, p.7)

Interestingly, as previously noted, the “romantic idea” here criticized by Sheffield exists in the comedian Aristophanes’ speech, which as previously argued, with reference to Nussbaum, in fact absorbs much of what Vlastos seemingly requires from a theory of love (section 2.4).

The idea that each and every one should do their best to discover which values are worth pursuing, seemingly for our own soul’s benefit and happiness, leads us towards Vlastos’ charge that the Platonic concept of love is essentially egoistic. Vlastos, who claims that Plato’s theory of love fails to give an account of love where the individual is the object, must somehow have been provoked by the Platonic idea that *happiness* is the aim and final object of love. Why else would he demand the individual to be the proper object of love? But, if we were to accept Vlastos’ claim that the individual, in his/her uniqueness and integrity, is not a proper object of love in Plato’s theory, do we indeed have to be provoked by this? Why *should* individuals and not “good things” which lead to *eudaimon*-happiness be objects of our love?

In this section I have argued that love’s *proton philon* is *eudaimonia*, and I have described *eudaimonia* as *happiness*. I have also argued that Vlastos is provoked by this. But in order to understand *why* he perceives this as provocative, I think it is necessary to consider Vlastos’ perception of the connection between the two terms *eudaimonia* and happiness. In fact, Vlastos does not see any difference between the normal English usage of the term *happiness* and the term *eudaimonia* as used by Plato. *Eudaimonia*, according to Vlastos, *may* be used to refer to the activities in which people find happiness – but it *must* not be so used, it may also be used to refer to mental states and feelings (Vlastos, 1991:202). The difference, he argues, between “happiness” and *eudaimonia* in their normal use is thus no greater than the difference

between alternative definitions of “happiness” in English dictionaries. How Vlastos understands the content of “normal happiness”, he does not say, but I am inclined to believe that it does not involve much ethical deliberation.

What *is* the content of eudaimonic happiness? As mentioned in the introduction, even though subjects like love, happiness and “the good life” are universal to humans, they clearly have subjective aspects. As Aristotle wrote, we may all agree to the claim that the name of the final good is “happiness”, “well-being” or “living well”, yet still disagree about the contents of these terms (EN. 1095a15–30). However, my impression is that Platonic eudaimonic happiness has objective implications, as it does not mean *experiencing pleasure*, or even *having a good time*. (Pleasure may be an important aspect of the good life, but we would need a more profound explanation of “pleasure”, and further arguments supporting such a standpoint, to conclude that this is so.) Being flourishing, being happy in a eudaimonic sense, in Plato’s view, is being *virtuous*.

3.3 Eudaimonism *versus* Vlastosian Kantianism

Vlastos writes that he shall use an Aristotelian standard as a means of measuring Plato’s theory of love, “a standard from his own time and place, so I would not have to risk gross anachronism” (Vlastos, 1973:6).⁴⁵ According to Vlastos, Aristotle is telling us that to love another person is to wish for that person’s good, for that person’s sake, doing whatever you can to make that wish come true. He asks: “That to love a person we must wish for that person’s good for that person’s sake, not for ours – so much Aristotle understands. Does Plato?” (Vlastos, 1973:6) Vlastos answer this question in the negative. But although he argues that Aristotle here understood something which Plato did not, this does not imply that he finds the Aristotelian concept of love perfect, on the contrary, he describes Aristotle’s notion of perfect love as rather “disappointing” (Vlastos, 1973:6).

However, to my mind, more crucial for Vlastos’ position is that his standard against which to measure Plato’s theory of love includes “clandestine” Kantian presuppositions. Vlastos concludes that Plato’s treatment of the individual is wrong, as he believes that Plato fails to

⁴⁵ The continuation of this line is “by going with Anders Nygren so far afield as the New Testament.” (Vlastos, 1973:6). Vlastos here refers to Nygren’s *Eros and Agape* (English translation by P.S. Watson, Harper Torchbook edition, New York 1969.) Although one could, partly as a continuation of Vlastos’ Kantian line of thought, argue that Vlastos himself *is* highly affected by the New Testament in his measuring, but I will not go into speculations about how Vlastos’ Christian faith affects his reading of Plato.

recognize that individuals have “intrinsic value as individual human beings”, and “the fact” that all individuals are to be treated as “ends in themselves”. Vlastos writes in a footnote that “Aristotle’s ‘wishing another’s good for his sake, not for yours’, though still far from the Kantian conception of treating persons as ‘ends in themselves’ is the closest any philosopher comes to it in classical antiquity.” (Vlastos, 1973:10; footnote 24). In my opinion, Vlastos is here through his “deferential mention of Kant in this context” (Price, 1990:10) revealing his true measurement and it is, as Sheffield writes, “distinctly Kantian in flavour” (Sheffield, p.24).

Contrasting eudaimonism and Kantianism, then, although not explicitly, Vlastos focuses on their differences; then he gives the Kantian ideas precedence.⁴⁶ It is well-known that there are some deep differences between morality within a eudaimonistic theory and Kant’s moral theory. The most fundamental difference, in my opinion, is that while Kant saw the world of nature and the world of morality as two entirely different matters, the ancient philosophers saw ontology and morality as two sides of the same coin, i.e. questions of morality were also questions of *being*. A consequence of this is that whereas ancient philosophers saw “being good” as the best way to reach *eudaimonia*, “Kant by contrast sees morality as standing in the sharpest possible contrast with happiness, indeed sometimes only to be achieved by sacrificing happiness” (Annas, 1993:449).

Sacrificing one’s own happiness, according to Kant, would ideally be a result of fulfilling a duty, doing *the right thing*, i.e. that which one is *obligated* to do. In other words, Kantian ethics is to be described as *deontology*, rooted in duties and laws, whereas Plato’s ethics is founded in that which makes a life good, *eudaimon*. Being a Kantian or not, one may hold, I suppose, that self-renunciation is (or should be) the keyword in the concept of an “ethically good life”. And *this* notion of “the good life” is certainly far from the one we may find in Plato.

Vlastos maintains the importance of loving the other independently *for the beloved’s sake*, as he critically characterizes Platonic love as utility-love. However, in contrast to Vlastos, I believe that the nuances between *for the beloved’s sake* and *for the lover’s sake* are in need of explanation. Consider the following statements:

⁴⁶ Please note that my aim here is to show how Vlastos’ Kantian line of thought affects his judging of Plato’s theory of love, and *not* to participate in a detailed discussion of how the Kantian principles *should* be interpreted.

1) I love A, for A's own sake.

2) I love A, because loving A makes *me* happy, i.e. my life (more) valuable.

In the Platonic conception of love, I don't think these two statements are incompatible. But, it seems to me that in the Vlastosian-Kantian notion of love, the first statement will pass as morally acceptable whereas the second will not; due to Vlastos' argumentation, the second statement would have to be characterized as cold-hearted and egoistic.

Vlastos establishes an opposition between A) *love for the lover's own sake* and B) *love for the beloved's sake alone*. I shall now argue that Vlastos with this opposition mixes up different concepts, and that whereas A is love, B is actually not love, but rather *care*. Let us take another look at Aristotle's definition. Aristotle is telling us that to love (or like, *to philein*) another person is to wish for that person's good, for that person's sake, doing whatever you can to make that wish come true. Although Vlastos does not do so, we may distinguish here between 1) "to love" another person, and 2) "to wish for that person's good, for that person's sake, doing whatever you can to make that wish come true". It would seem like 2 is rather *care*, it is something you do, *if* 1, if you *love/like* someone. My argument here is that one may legitimately hold that to love someone essentially involves 2, but 1 (*to love*) cannot be identical with 2 (good wishing/care).⁴⁷

Further: there may be different reasons besides love to wish for that person's good, for that person's sake, doing whatever you can to make that wish come true. For example, a) benevolence, b) duty, c) pity, d) self-interest (an employer may wish good for his employees, so that they perform their jobs better). Moreover, we may legitimately talk about a person's "right to be cared for", especially when this person is in a *philia*-relationship, but may we talk about "the right to be loved"? There seems to be a difference here, between love and care, which Vlastos fails to see.

Following this line of thought, one may wonder, then, how Vlastos would distinguish love between individuals from "straightforward charity-work", c.f. the distinction between *love*

⁴⁷ I have argued that Vlastos' conception of love seems rather to be a concept of *care*. One may ask then: "If care, respect, commitments, duties and other related concepts are 'just' essential effects of (or 'ingredients' in) love, but not to be reckoned *as love*, what, then, *is* love? And would not this kind of love, if it really exists, that is, be highly volatile?" These are serious questions, and difficult to answer. To sum up what love *is* in one single sentence, however, is an attempt sentenced to fail. (Moreover, I do not think that we should accept inadequate synonyms as definitions because love itself is hard to explain.) Nevertheless, I give an account of what I think it means for Plato, perhaps clearest expressed in section 3.5 and chapter 5. In answering these questions briefly and without Platonic references, though, I think one would have to bring up several other discussions, for example the previously mentioned discussion of whether love is a "brute fact" or not.

and *care*. If in a relationship of love, one should *only* wish good for the beloved, what then makes this relationship different from relationships rooted in charity? Indeed, I believe such a theory of love would fail to give a satisfying account of interpersonal love. If A is friends with B solely for B's sake, why would this be more of an ideal relationship than if A were in this relationship because of what *he* got out of it, because *he* enjoys the relationship and finds it to be valuable in *his* life? Or as Kosman more elegantly remarks: "Indeed, we should feel some apprehension if we thought our lovers didn't get satisfaction from their love of us." (Kosman, 1976:64)

Although one may justly argue that in loving relationships one has commitments and duties toward each other, and that a relationship would not endure if both were constantly and exclusively to focus on their own "happiness-maximizing" – would one want a friend or lover that looks upon the relationship *solely* in terms of duty? Following Vlastos' demands, would we not end up with a theory we may reckon as a theory of, say, "responsibility toward one's beloved", instead of a theory of *love*? Even if we were to meet Vlastos half-way, arguing that in perhaps some kinds of *philia*-love (for instance that toward one's family and spouses), from time to time, *is* and/or *should* be directed out of duty, solely because it is the right thing to do, is it legitimate to demand of a theory of *eros*?⁴⁸

Vlastos writes about how the Platonic lover fails to treat the beloved as "an end in himself" (Vlastos, 1973:10). But how are we to understand this Kantian-Vlastosian demand of "treating individuals as ends in themselves"? Although Vlastos never mentions it, the Kantian line of thought in his demands requires a brief examination of the concept of *autonomy*.⁴⁹ For Kant freedom is to be autonomous, that means, to act after laws imposed by one self. Another Kantian dictum is the "choice of own ends", referring to self-determination and the freedom to pursue own ends. On Irwin's account, "Plato sees no special value attached to a person as an autonomous agent choosing for himself, he has no reason to respect the freedom of persons" (Irwin 1977:274). By and large, I have to agree with Irwin on this point, especially if one thinks about the already mentioned argument of *ergon* highlighted in the *Republic*, that each person should do what that person is most "suited" for. So I have to conclude that surely, on the point of freedom to choose one's own ends, Plato clearly differs from modern and Vlastos-Kantian perspectives. So what *is* in the Platonic lover's concern?

⁴⁸ C.f., section 1.3, where I defined *philia* as being more concerned with care, and *eros* to be more connected to intense desire.

⁴⁹ From Greek, *auto* (self), *nomos* (law).

A platonic lover is primarily concerned with altering someone else to make him more virtuous, so that he achieves his own interests; naturally, then, he values those aspects of someone, and tries to develop them. A Kantian is not exclusively concerned with making someone virtuous, and does not value someone purely for his actual or potential virtue, but as an autonomous agent. (Irwin, 1977:272)

Ultimately, I suppose, the Vlastos-Kantian would have to respect B's autonomy regarding his interests and choice of ends, *even if* these "ends" are regarded by A to be harmful to B. This way, Plato fails to meet the Vlastos-Kantian demand of correct love based on respect for the beloved's autonomy. So does Aristotle as well, when he writes that to love another person is "wanting for someone what one thinks good"⁵⁰ (*Rhet.*1380b35–1381a2). Recalling Lysis and the discussion of his freedom, or lack thereof, my impression is that we were here introduced to "love as guiding" the beloved in "the right direction", defined by the lover, in Lysis' case, his father. It was perhaps Vlastos' Kantian line of thought, then, that affected him into thinking that this was an unsatisfying kind of love.

Once again: What does it mean to treat an individual person as an "end in himself"? "[I]f it means 'Treat rational beings as autonomous end-choosers above all else', then a Kantian has reason to complain of Plato" (Irwin, 1977:272). But although Plato's theory of love may be accused of paternalism whereas "Kantian love" would not, this is not sufficient grounds for accusing Plato's theory of being egoistical; after all, we don't always know what is best for ourselves, sometimes our dear ones know better. Moreover, the Socratic method consists in making a person realize what is best *on his own*; by guidance of course, but not by force.⁵¹

Putting an end to this discussion, I would have to say that I agree with Sheffield: "We need not accept a moral psychological framework that groups motives in categories of duty versus inclination and then views the latter as primarily egoistic." (Sheffield, p.25) That Plato did not operate with "categories of duty", or other Kantian ideas, such as ultimately respect for the "autonomous agent" and his "choice of own ends", does *not* justify Vlastos' descriptions of Plato's theory of love as basically egoistic.

According to Penner and Rowe, the Vlastosian/Kantian idea that one shall love another *independently* of one's own happiness "tends to suck one into such ideas as pure friendship, pure altruism, pure mother-love – as if there were no question of our own happiness being 'wrapped up in' the happiness of a friend" (Penner & Rowe, 2005:281) In the next section, I

⁵⁰ Or: "what he thinks good". According to Cooper, the ancient Greek here is ambiguous (c.f., Cooper, 1999:313; *Rhet.*1380b35–1381a2).

⁵¹ I return to the Platonic insistence on the importance of individual learning and Socrates as guide in section 4.1.

shall further examine the distinction between "for the beloved's sake" and "for the lover's own sake".

3.4 Self-love

What does it mean "to put the beloved's happiness above one's own" – how do I distinguish *my* happiness from my beloved's happiness? Consider the following expressions:

1) I must help this child by giving him what he needs.

2) I must help this child with whose happiness my own happiness is so wrapped up.⁵²

Even if I, as the parent of this child in need, had to suffer, I suppose I would – as I suppose most parents would, sacrifice a lot, if not to say *it all*, to help my child. However, the question is not about the parent's love of the child, but whether statement 1 or 2 is most correct. Would the parent help his child *simply* because of 1? Is it the parent's love for the child, independently of the parent's own happiness, that would motivate the parent to help it whatever personal cost, or the parent's own desire to be happy? (Moreover, who is to say that the thoughts/intentions behind these two statements cannot be identical?)

Using a less dramatic example, one may say that there may be different reasons for giving someone a present for Christmas. It may be solely because of the receiver's sake, or out of duty, i.e. simply because one is "supposed to", but if the receiver is someone the giver really loves, then perhaps it is *not* solely for the receiver's sake, but also for the giver's own sake, since giving the present and (hopefully) seeing the receiver happy would make the giver happy himself? The question is this: If the giver takes pleasure in his own giving, a pleasure that is rooted in seeing the other happy (and not, say, a pleasure rooted in indirectly showing off how much money he has through giving away a very expensive present), is he thereby egoistical?

Of course, sometimes, even though one may *think* one does something for one's beloved's sake, one ends up doing something for one's own good instead. For instance, I believe many couples have experienced that one of them offers to "do something for the other's sake", let's say, to make a romantic dinner, and then it turns out that the initiator – most likely without

⁵² Shortened and reconstructed argument inspired by Penner and Rowe (2005), pp. 281–291.

even noticing, has cooked his/her own favorite meal. In this case, it seems fair to claim that the hidden motive was the initiator's own happiness (gained through the satisfaction of appetite), even though the expressed intention was to do something romantic for the beloved. However, I don't think such an action classifies as pure selfishness. What *is* selfishness, then? Penner and Rowe offer the following definition: "It is *not caring for the good of anyone else, and being prepared to harm others if one supposes one will be made happy by doing so.*" (Penner & Rowe, 2005:290)⁵³ According to Penner and Rowe, selfishness cannot be identified as *self-interest*, in particular not by anyone who believes that our happiness is closely linked to the happiness of others, especially those we love.

According to Irwin, two types of egoism must be distinguished when discussing egoism and eudaimonism, in order to find out whether Platonic love involves concern for others:⁵⁴

1. Moral solipsism; all virtue must contribute instrumentally either to some intrinsically valued condition of the agent, or to some state of affairs he values for its own sake apart from any benefit or harm to other people.
2. Moral egocentrism; all virtue must contribute to some end valued by the agent as part of his own good.

"Moral solipsism" requires that concern for other people's good is instrumental to the agent's own good; whereas moral egocentrism does not require this, since other people's good here might be a component of the agent's own good. Following these definitions, then, Penner and Rowe would support the view that Plato's perspective is morally egocentric, but not morally solipsistic. Irwin offers arguments from both sides: Firstly, he provides evidence of Platonic moral solipsism, arguing that Plato advocates the practice of virtue for the benefit of the soul, and moreover, treats the soul's good condition as a good in itself, in such a way that we might suppose that only the soul's condition is valuable in itself.

Yet another source of moral solipsism in Plato, he argues, is Plato's contemplative ideal; when Plato tends to think that the soul's good is to be reached wholly and solely by a contemplative study, he accepts a solipsist final good (Irwin, 1977:256). However, Irwin continues, there is also evidence for a moral non-solipsism in Plato, as the just man also chooses the just action because "it fulfills his desire to embody justice in his actions and in the

⁵³ One could argue, I suppose, that love sometimes could lead one into committing egoistical deeds, where the lover does *not* care for the good of others, and *is* prepared to harm others, perhaps even the ones he/she loves. However, I shall not follow this line of reasoning.

⁵⁴ Irwin, 1977:255. For Irwin on egoism and eudaimonism, see chapter VIII in *Plato's Moral Theory*, 1977.

world. The just man's 'propagative' desire, described also in the *Symposium*, prevents his ultimate end from being solipsist." (Irwin, 1977:257)

Regarding the charge of egoism I think it is important to note that Plato himself is not trying to defend some moral thesis which defends what we may consider to be ethical egoism. He tries to find out what is rational for the agent to do. As Irwin writes:

A modern moralist might want to know what morality is, what moral principles or virtues are; supposing we can roughly distinguish morality from other things, he will try to explain this distinction, and give an account of the principles underlying moral judgments. Some might answer this question by saying that moral principles are prescriptive, universalizable, and overriding principles by which a man guides his life, or that they are the principles that rational self-interested agents would choose under certain assumptions about their knowledge, or that they are the principles which produce the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Plato offers no answer to compare with these, because he is not asking the same question. Socrates and Plato ask "how a man should live"; and when they want to find the virtues, they want to find the states which a rational man will choose when he answers this question correctly. (Irwin, 1977:249)

One may doubt that Plato's ambitious question, "how one should live", is answerable, or that the answer is of the kind that Plato is searching for. However, one should not try to simplify the question by confusing it with a narrower one; studying Plato's theory of love requires taking the Platonic ontology into account.

Whereas Penner and Rowe distinguish between selfishness and self-interest, and Irwin between moral solipsism and moral egocentrism, Kosman offers a third distinction when examining to what extent Plato's theory of love should be regarded as egoistic. Kosman refers to Plato's ontology when he argues that Vlastos is mistaken in his perception of Plato's theory of love as essentially egotistical. There is a difference, Kosman argues, between "egoistic love" and what he refers to as existential "self-love".⁵⁵ He argues that: "In self-love, lover and beloved are one; but such love is always love of the "ecstatic" self. [...] The self is thus itself a metaxy, poised between, so to speak, that which it just "is" and that which it *is*." (Kosman, 1976:63) Kosman sees self-love as a central kind of love where the self loves its own mixed entity between both:

A) Itself and another's self; as due to the distinction of being/becoming, the self is always in a state of *becoming*, and therefore both like and unlike the lover; and:

⁵⁵ Other scholars also use the term "self-love" when discussing this matter. (See Irwin, 1977:258–259)

B) What it “just is” i.e. “happens to be”, and what it essentially *is*, as I take it, *one’s nature*, which may even consist of “parts” separated from it, c.f.:

Erotic love is thus primarily for Plato *self-love*, for it is finally our true self which is at once native to us and lacked by us. “Self-love” does not here mean love for *love*, like understanding of understanding in the *Charmenides*, but one’s love of one’s self. Nor does it mean *selfish* love [...] It means at the human level that erotic self-striving which characterizes all being: the desire of each thing to become what it is. (Kosman, 1976:60)

According to Kosman then, self-love – roughly defined as one’s love of one’s *self*, is a desire *to become what one is*. But how does a focus on what is best for oneself, and *to become what one is*, escape straying into what we may justly call *selfish concern*? It seems to me that in Kosman’s view, this kind of love is not egoistical because of its ontological aspects, that it “characterizes all being” (Kosman, 1976:60). Thus, we seem to be confronted (once again) with the ancient moral universe where the ontological distinction “being/becoming” and morality are intimately connected. The importance of understanding this nexus cannot be overrated; therefore I shall in the next section follow the path here indicated by Kosman.

3.5 Longing and belonging

Eros’ genesis is depicted as never completed but sentenced to search for the fulfillment of his lacks and needs. But what does *eros* need, what does *eros* long for? Recalling the discussion of the *proton philon*, Kosman explains this principle through the terms *phusei oikeion* and *endeeis*:

The *phusei oikeion* is seen to be that which we necessarily love (...) the conclusion is clear and interesting, for it suggests that the *proton philon* is that of which we may be said to be *properly endeeis*, and this is our own true but fugitive nature, that which is for us *phusei oikeion*, even if we are separated from it. (Kosman, 1976:60)

I here understand *endeeis* to be another term for describing “lack” or “need”. Kosman argues that *that* of which one is properly *endeeis*, and therefore longs for, is not simply that which one does not have, or wants in the sense of desiring, but that which one *lacks* and wants in the sense of needing, missing and requiring for the fulfilment and completion of one’s nature (Kosman, 1976:59). Thus, he argues, what love longs for, and what we long for, is the fulfilment of our own nature, i.e. that which belongs to us by nature, in other words, that which for us is *phusei oikeion*.

As T. Brian Mooney observes, there seems to be a parallel between Kosman’s view of love and that which is to be found in Aristophanes’ speech; “The similarity between the position

outlined here [Kosman's] and that presented by Aristophanes in *Symposium* is especially noteworthy" (Mooney, 2002:314). Naturally, Kosman is well-aware of this parallel himself, as he writes that:

To recognize my erotic striving as fundamentally directed toward my true being is to recognize, with Aristophanes, Eros as that "great god who leads us *eis to oikeion*..., *eis ten archaia phusin*, who restores us to our native selves, to our true and original nature. (Kosman, 1976:61; *Symp.* 193d)

Indeed, although appealing,⁵⁶ with all its metaphysical presuppositions of love, Aristophanes' speech may occasionally seem a little "silly" – and with our knowledge about his profession, we might even suspect that he is joking with us, trying to make us laugh.⁵⁷ However, his words *do* support the theory of love as self-love, i.e. auto-erotic strive for completeness. The question is whether his speech is an impact of Platonic irony or not. However, Aristophanes asks to be taken seriously:

the two are struck from their senses by love, by a sense of belonging to one another, and by desire, and they don't want to be separated from one another, not even for a moment (...) "Love" is the name of our pursuit of wholeness, for our desire to be complete (...) as I begged you earlier, don't make comedy of it. (*Symp.* 192b, 192e, 193d).

What makes the creatures in Aristophanes' speech fall in love is the feeling of kinship and intimacy, an existential joy of finding a part of your own being in another. Moreover, it seems like love is like an *energia*, a stable activity, always present as a part of our ontological nature, as we strive to be "with" what we long for, which is equivalent to that which we consider to belong to us. (*Symp.* 192b–c).

But, if we necessarily love that which belongs to us by nature, then, how do we define/decide *what* belongs to us by nature? What is one's "true self"? It seems to me that the discussion of longing/belonging has to refer not exclusively to erotic love, as examined in the *Symposium*. Although Kosman consistently writes about *eros*, I believe that there are good reasons for applying the same pattern of thoughts in understanding the *philia*-love described in the dialogue *Lysis*. We here find the very same perspective, that we (shall/must) love that which *belongs to us*, as Socrates states that "what belongs to us by nature has shown itself to us as something we must love." (*Lys.* 222 a) Moreover, "the good itself" is actually said to be belonging (*Lys.* 222d). But to what extent may we claim that *Lysis* "belongs" to his parents by

⁵⁶ My impression is that Aristophanes' speech is more widely known, appreciated and cited than any of the other speeches in the *Symposium*.

⁵⁷ A suspicion that would be shared by Eryximachos, *Symp.* 189a–b.

nature, so that they “must” love him? What is the *range* of the concept *oikeion*, understood as “one’s own”?⁵⁸

While Nussbaum translates *oikeiotes* with *intimacy*, Julia Annas renders the verb *oikeioo* as *familiarize*, as she argues that this term has both a) one personal and b) one social aspect: “(a) nature familiarizes a human with him/herself; and (b) nature familiarizes a human with other humans” (Annas, 1993:262). In line with Kosman Annas argues that we have a natural and congenital impulse to preserve and to care for ourselves. This tendency of self-love, she writes, which we all begin with, differs from *oikeiosis* in such a way that *oikeiosis* is not to be understood as egoistic self-love; “rather it is the tendency we have both towards developing self-concern and towards developing other-concern.”⁵⁹ (Annas, 1993:263) In other words, our concern for others is a natural development from our instinctive and primitive self-concern; in such a way that other-concern, which we learn as we grow up, is in fact a part of our instinctive nature. We all have concern for our “parts”, which may (as Kosman also explains) very well be detached from ourselves, yet still be *phusei oikeion* to us.⁶⁰ However, despite the shared eudaimonic framework and terminology, the different perceptions of the term *oikeiosis* provide various consequences for different ancient moral theories. For example, whereas it for the Stoics “ends up with concern for any human being just as such” (Annas, 1993:265), the scope of other-concern for Plato (and Aristotle) is more limited, as it requires some kind of intimacy.

Is the consequence of the notion that we love what belongs to us, that we then, in fact, thus only love what is our own, only love, so to speak, an extended version of ourselves? What does it mean, after all, to claim that our beloved ones belong to us – in what sense do we “own” them? When Nussbaum argues that there are several structural parallels between sexual desire and the desire for wisdom, she writes that: “Both are directed towards objects in the world, and aim at somehow grasping or possessing these objects.” (Nussbaum, 2007:190) Although I by large agree with Nussbaum’s observation, I believe that *have* is a better translation than *posses*, as the original Greek term *echein* is, to the best of my knowledge, a more neutral word than its most common English translation *possess*, as *possess* indicates owning: *Have* also serves the meaning better, i.e. you have (hold of) a friend/lover, and you

⁵⁸ C.f., e.g. Price, 1990:8

⁵⁹ In *The Morality of Happiness*, Annas avoids all talk about egoism and talks instead, as the quote shows, about self-concern and other-concern.

⁶⁰ C.f., quote p.45.

(might) *have* knowledge, without the aspects of *owning*. Claiming to *own* either one of them seems equally absurd.

3.6 Concluding remarks

“All right”, I said, “what belongs to us by nature has shown itself to us as something we must love”.
Socrates, *Lysis*, 222a.

Like *Lysis*, Socrates’ “victim” in the dialogue bearing his name, we have to be careful not to be bamboozled. We have to be aware that even though the arguments in the *Lysis* come across as quite straightforward, (after all, Socrates is persuading teenagers) there might be hidden information. We are more or less told that Socrates shall bamboozle *Lysis* into *thinking* that he is unloved; I believe we ought to take this setting into account when judging Socrates’ words. But Vlastos fails to pay attention to the dialogue’s premises, and this failure results in a misreading of the dialogue as a whole.

“In many people it is already an impertinence to say ‘I’.” (Adorno, 1974:50) By and large, the moral philosophy of the 20th century, when Vlastos wrote his article, was considered with *the other* – not the *I* – as the focus of discussion. Vlastos concludes that Plato’s theory of love is essentially egoistic, because, according to Vlastos, the Platonic lover fails to love the other for the other’s sake. For Vlastos, this adds up to his conviction that Plato’s account of love is not, after all, an account of *love*. I have argued that Vlastos here 1) mixes up different conceptions, such as love, care and respect, and that this leads him towards 2); the assumption that love has to be altruistic and not self-interested. Further, as the examples inspired by Penner and Rowe illustrated, (and this point is as simple as it is crucial): One needs to be careful when using the expression “for the sake of”, as this expression is much more complex than Vlastos takes it to be, and not an expression which can be used *tout court*.

Kosman’s account of *eros* as self-love, i.e. self-striving to become whole, certainly offers a convincing perspective on Plato’s theory of love. Moreover, I believe his account equally applies to *philia*-love. If Platonic love is filling up one’s own lack by nature, then maybe it is impossible to love another *entirely* for the beloved’s sake alone, and thus unreasonable and naive to demand love to be exclusively for the beloved’s sake. However, someone may claim that Kosman’s interpretation does not escape the charge of egoism, by arguing that “the individual person’s ontology cannot be used in justifying their behavior”. Once again, then,

we are confronted with the question of what role individuals' ontologies play, or should play, in matters of morality. Deciding to which degree Platonic love represents a moral lack, then, I believe depends on one's positioning regarding this question. On this point, when deciding, I believe it is important to remember that for Plato, "one's nature" is *not* to be used as an excuse, c.f. the distinction of *being/becoming*. For Plato, individuals are always to be seen in an aspect of *becoming*; and if done correctly they strive towards the ideals represented by the Ideas, for the realization of these.

Furthermore, I think that Vlastos' interpretation of *eudaimonia* fails to acknowledge the (for Plato) necessary bond between *eudaimonia* and *arete*. As much as what Plato writes about virtue is compelling, surely to Vlastos as well, there seems to be the Platonic insistence on the importance of *eudaimonia* that tends to, so to speak, spoil things in Vlastos' view, as the virtues then, in his interpretation, are left in shadow. I perceive Vlastos' view upon this matter to be that Plato should have realized that living virtuously does *not* lead to happiness, but that living virtuously contrariwise implies sacrifice of one's happiness.

"Kant wanted to distance his ethics from the idea that we might satisfy our own desires, in part because he held a conception of desire as a non-rational inclination" (Sheffield, p.24) However, for Plato (and Aristotle), some desires are open to rational deliberation and cultivation – they are certainly not solely bodily inclinations – moreover, desires for the good are even necessary in living an ethical life.⁶¹ If one operates with a more rational concept of *eudaimonia* than Vlastos does, i.e. if one understands *eudaimonia* to require rational deliberation and (self-) reflection in order to reveal the goods one *should* desire, then perhaps the distance between Kant and Plato on how best to live, although with different foundations, need not be so great when it comes to the actual *outcome*. Thus, to my way of thinking, Vlastos' Kantian charge need not cut so deeply either.

However, we may conclude that "Kantian love" requires that the lover must recognize the beloved as an *autonomous agent with the right to the freedom of choosing own ends*, and that Plato indeed fails to meet this Kantian demand. Nonetheless, a way of defending Plato from Kantian-based criticism without downplaying their differences is to argue in line with Irwin, that: "If we suppose that Plato cannot justify love of persons for their own sakes or for themselves because he is not a Kantian, we are wrong" (Irwin, 1977:272). In the next chapter

⁶¹ In fact, even *madness* may be a source of the finest things. I return to this point in the next chapter, when discussing the *Phaedrus*.

I examine the possibility that Plato's theory of love may justly be said to include "love for the beloved's own sake" after all – just not in the Vlastos-Kantian understanding of the phrase, not in a way which is *indifferent* to the lover's own interests.

Vlastos' view on love in terms of Kantian altruism is clearly in contrast with my view, supported by Penner and Rowe (and I believe Plato would have agreed too), that love does in the end affect our self-interests. When reflecting upon how best to live my life, then, unless I am an extreme kind of Kantian, I have to ask myself what I want, what kind of needs and desires I have. So even though we *may* agree with Vlastos that the Platonic lover is incapable of loving others entirely for "their own sake", and that Vlastos is correct when stating that "Plato's theory is not, and is not meant to be, about personal love for persons" (Vlastos, 1973:26), *we may still hold that this is not a criticism of Plato*, nor the *Lysis*, the *Symposium* or the Platonic version of eudaimonic love.

I believe that according to Plato, having concern for others *is* in our self-interest, because being virtuous contributes to one's happiness; happiness is specifically said to be achieved *through* the acquisition of *agatha*, i.e. of the Good. And the Good, *eudaimonia*, is the final goal of all our desires (Symp 204e–205a). Morality, then, is necessary for happiness, in a non-instrumental way. If one was to insist, then, arguing that this kind of "morality which is supposedly self-interested" is just a veiled and cosmetic version of being egoistic, one may wonder whether this kind of egoism really conflicts with morality at all.

Nussbaum writes that "The *Symposium* is a work about passionate erotic love – a fact that would be hard to infer from some of the criticism written about it." (Nussbaum, 2007:167). I suppose Nussbaum here has Vlastos' moral criticism in mind. I agree with Nussbaum that the dialogue is about erotic love, however, I think her statement is unfair, as I believe Vlastos is perfectly entitled to promote the criticism he does. As argued, the *telos* of *eros* is *eudaimonia* – moreover, all kinds of desire have *eudaimonia* as their *telos* – and therefore, I take it, in being concerned with either *eros* or *philia* or both, all three of the dialogues I am analyzing, namely, the *Symposium*, the *Lysis* and the *Phaedrus*, are to be recognized as *ethical works*. Therefore I think that Vlastos' moral objections are legitimate, although, as shown, I am critical regarding their validity.

But what, after all, does Plato write about interpersonal loving relationships? In the *Lysis* Socrates advises Hippothales to stop praising the boy he loves, and as shown we are also

offered reflections upon parental love. In the next chapter I continue to examine Plato's view on loving relationships, how he regards and advises the individual, and how it seems necessary for an individual to have firsthand knowledge of loving feelings, gained through active engagement and experience, in order to recognize and realize what is valuable and worth pursuing in life.

4 Friends, Lovers and Toys

The primary aim of this chapter is to highlight two aspects which in Vlastos' account are subjected to insufficient treatment: Firstly, the essential backdrop of Plato's erotic dialogues, the *paiderastia*⁶² of classical Athens, and secondly, three accounts of loving relationships in the *Phaedrus*.

To understand how Plato in his theory of love applies sexual metaphors and models to illustrate epistemic, ontological and ethical aspects of *eros* and *philia*, a central entry point is the examination of the sexual ethos current in his time and place. By and large, Vlastos overlooks this. However, one may perhaps excuse Vlastos on this point, at least to some extent, as classical scholars in Vlastos' time did not (as they do now) talk in details about the *paiderastia*.⁶³ So even though Vlastos did not discuss the *paiderastia*, when studying Platonic love and its treatment of individual persons today, an examination of this system ought to be included.

I intend to show that one of the nexuses' one faces during an examination of this system is that between *love* and the importance of *individual learning*, which, when properly observed, leads to *self-knowledge*. As previously argued, *eudaimonia* is the aim and final object of love, and the acquisition of wisdom is pivotal in understanding what kinds of "good things" that lead one towards the eudaimonic life. The following examination is based on the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, as both of these two dialogues offer a significant illumination of this phenomenon.

As mentioned earlier, some hold that Plato's undermining of individuality is most striking in the *Phaedrus*.⁶⁴ The claim that Plato undermines individuality is central in Vlastos' criticism. However, he barely mentions this dialogue. From my point of view, this is baffling. After all, Vlastos clearly *knew* the dialogue and its content well, which is highly concerned with precisely *philia* and *eros*. So we are puzzled: When he wrote his article "The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato", why did he not analyze this dialogue? Naturally, I do not know the answer to this question. But I find it very interesting that the *Phaedrus* seems to fare far better

⁶² The Greek term *paiderastia* is combined by the words *pais*, masc. *paidos* (boy, slave, son, boy child) and the word *erastes* (lover). I shall give a more detailed description of the latter later on.

⁶³ C.f., e.g., Burnyeat, 1992:138. Moreover, several authoritative studies of sexuality in ancient Greece were published after Vlastos' article, e.g. Dover (1978), Halperin (1990) and Laqueur (1990).

⁶⁴ See p. 19

than the *Lysis* and the *Symposium*, considering Vlastos' charges. In the last section of this chapter, I examine arguments suggesting that Plato *does* provide a satisfying account of *philia*, one which includes personal love for persons, *for their own sake*.

Through the perspective of the pivotal and complex system of the *paiderastia*, and the different accounts of loving relationships given in the *Phaedrus*, one catches sight of yet another reason for turning to the *Phaedrus*: This is the dialogue which provides the clearest Platonic advice on how an individual agent should orient himself in loving relationships, and moreover, in this dialogue we see how personal relationships constitute, after all, a central part of Plato's theory of love.

4.1 Socrates and the Athenian *paiderastia*

As mentioned, Socrates claims to have knowledge about one subject only; love. The background of this statement is highly unclear, and I shall not repeat my speculations, but rather try to find an answer by looking at the structural parallels between love, sexual desire and the desire for wisdom. When Socrates claims to know *ta erotika*, i.e. "the art of love", I think it's interesting to see this in relation to the verb *erotan*, which means "to ask questions", a "connection explicitly exploited in the *Cratylus* (398c–e)" (Reeve, 2006:294). And if it is one thing Socrates *does* know, it is how to ask questions and converse elenctically, inviting his conversation partners, including us readers, into reflection.

The dialogue *Symposium* begins with an introduction of Aristodemus, a young boy who meets Socrates as Socrates is on his way to the tragic poet Agathon. Socrates invites him to come along.⁶⁵ *Agathon* means "good" in Greek, and this is exploited as Socrates assures Aristodemus that "Good men go uninvited to Goodman's feast" (*Symp.* 174b). But Socrates refuses to escort him safely into the party, he orders Aristodemus to walk the last part alone (*Symp.* 175d–e). Already here, in the very beginning of the dialogue, we are thus introduced to the aspects of individual learning. The teacher (nor the lover, one might add) cannot help his student by going all the way for him. In the *Symposium*, this is later underscored with an example: "How wonderful it would be, dear Agathon, if the foolish were filled with wisdom simply by touching the wise. If only wisdom were like water, which always flows from a full cup into an empty one" (*Symp.* 175cd) – I take this metaphor's meaning to be that there are no

⁶⁵ Aristodemus was in fact sent an invitation, but he didn't receive it.

mechanics in learning: Intercourse with wise people is not sufficient in itself, Agathon does *not* attain Socrates' wisdom by lying beside him (*Symp.* 175d). It seems that wisdom and love are activities one has to *engage* in, in order to learn.

The importance of individual learning also occurs in Alcibiades' speech. Alcibiades was known for his love of victory, pre-eminence, honor and fame – but also for his frustration, anger and pain (*Symp.* 219c–e, 217e–218a). In the *Symposium*, these thumoeidic passions are clearly still central to his makeup.⁶⁶ He speaks honestly about Socrates' rejection of him, how he once slept next to Socrates, with his hand under Socrates' clothes, without anything happening. Afterwards he was humiliated and upset about this. Alcibiades even proclaims that he will “get his revenge some other time” (*Symp.* 213d), and Socrates “speaks of his fear of Alcibiades' violent jealousy” (Nussbaum, 2007:171; *Symp.* 213d). Why didn't Socrates just tell him that he was not interested in Alcibiades in *that way*, why did he have to “torture” the honor-loving Alcibiades by humiliating him? It seems to me that Alcibiades had to reach this insight on his own, that the Socratic wisdom has an indirect character which invites and demands the learning individual to find the answers by himself.

As mentioned, the dialogue *Symposium* takes place at a *symposium*, a party, which can hardly be said to be a typical philosophical setting. Why this location? As readers of the dialogue, we are granted a perspective of what we may call “the education of desire”. The *paidierastia* was an accepted and respectable institution in the higher social circles in classical Athens, and the erotic relationships had both a social and an educational function.⁶⁷ And what better location could be chosen to illustrate this than a dinner party, where grown successful men and young boys are socializing, talking about fundamental questions while lying beside each other drinking alcoholic nectar and flirting?

What about the young girls and women, then? The young girls, hired for flute-playing and sexual favors, are on the doctor Eryximchos' advice sent out of the *andron*, the “gentlemen's room”, in the very beginning of the dialogue. Seemingly, they cannot be present while the men hold their speeches.⁶⁸ As previously stated, not even Diotima is actually present. So why

⁶⁶ For instance, he admits his “desire to please the crowd.” (*Symp.* 216b). In these aspects, then, Alcibiades does not differ so much from Achilles, the typical thumoeidic character in Greek prose. (And just as Socrates here refuses Alcibiades, he condemns Achilles behavior in the *Republic*, passage 387.)

⁶⁷ On the role of the pederasty in Athens, see Dover (1989), and Halperin (1986).

⁶⁸ A flute-girl is mentioned later, in relation to Alcibiades' late arrival, but she too is sent out (212c). Furthermore, although he is married to Xantippe and has children, his feelings for her are barely mentioned, and her voice never occurs in Plato's writings.

would Plato use a female character, Diotima, to instruct upon love? Every other Platonic character *is* male, so it seems implausible that she is female simply by accident. Note that she teaches about getting *kyein*, pregnant, and about how painful it is to give birth. Perhaps Diotima's gender gives some sort of authority to the theory of love as reproduction?⁶⁹ However, I am convinced that Diotima's character and role has to be understood in relation to hierarchic positions, and that these positions are of preliminary importance to understanding Plato's perspective on interpersonal love.

In Plato's writings, we find a distinction between *malakia* (weak, cowardly, "girly") and *andreia* (strong, brave, masculine, "manly").⁷⁰ Although it may seem so, this distinction does not merely represent a distinction between the two sexes; it is an evaluative distinction indicating status. This may be further illustrated by the terms of different roles within the *paiderastia*. Briefly put, one part in the paederastic relationship, usually the older and more successful one, was characterized as the active part, the *erastes*. The passive part, usually being a young boy, was referred to as the beloved, the *eromenos*.⁷¹ The passiveness of the beloved becomes utterly clear in the metaphor of the lover as a sculptor and the beloved as the statue, as if the beloved were simply passive material (*Phdr.* 252d–235b). The *eromenos* was expected to be passive and reluctant, but not *totally* resistant, especially not if the *erastes* was a respectable man. One way of thinking about how the young boys should conduct themselves, then, is through the Victorian ideas of what was suitable sexual etiquette for women.

The hierarchy between the lover and beloved in the *paiderastia* is unmistakable. One of the more interesting explanations of this is that the lover is considered more "genuine" in his loving. Because he is the active part, he responds to beauty more directly, whereas the beloved "only" reflects the love of the lover, i.e. duplicates this love – if we were to *really* describe this duplication grossly, we could perhaps even say that the beloved is a *Narcissus* compared to the noble lover of beauty. For due to the lover's "directness", his love is more noble than the beloved's "back-love" will ever be, even if the lover just loves the beloved *qua*

⁶⁹ To read more about the mysterious and sovereign Diotima, I suggest David Halperin's essay "Why was Diotima a Woman?" (1990). (Nussbaum too offers interesting remarks while discussing Diotima's name, see Nussbaum, 2001 p.177.)

⁷⁰ The term *andreia* is derived from *anér*, meaning "man" (Hobbs, 2000:69). The term *malakia* is for example used by Plato in the passage about Leontius and *akrasia* ("weakness") in the *Republic*.

⁷¹ Also used about females, in feminine form: *eromene*. Other distinctions applied is *poion* ("the active") and *pathon* ("the suffering"), and analogies where the lover is the charioteer and the boy a young horse (there are many more analogies with horses when talked about *eros*, my guess is that horses symbolized masculine sexual energy), but I prefer to use the distinction *erastes/eromenos*.

a beautiful face. In the *Phaedrus*, the “echo” which returns from the beloved to the lover is explicitly explained:⁷²

Then the boy is in love, but has no idea what he loves. He does not understand, and cannot explain, what has happened to him. It is as if he had caught an eye disease from someone else, but could not identify the cause; he does not realize that he is seeing himself in the lover as in a mirror. (*Phdr.* 255d)

Perhaps by letting a *woman* teach Socrates, Socrates escaped the “tag” *eromenos*? For Socrates, as the intellectual hero, should be pictured as an active lover, an *erastes*, I suppose.

One may also wonder whether, or to what extent, the erotic hierarchy of roles plays a part in Socrates’ response to Alcibiades’ tribute to him. In Socrates own speech, *he* is described as the lover, but (as previously shown) in Alcibiades’ speech Socrates is the object of love, described as the incarnation of beauty and wisdom. (Note that in *Symposium* we meet a portrait of a significant older Alcibiades, than in for instance the dialogue *Alcibiades*. Alcibiades is no longer to be reckoned as a boy, he has reached the age of thirty-four.) In Nussbaum’s account, “Alcibiades begins as the beautiful *eromenos*, but seems to end as the active *erastes*” (Nussbaum, 2007:188). He appears as a genuine lover in his speech, *he loves Socrates*, and is thus the active subject. This becomes utterly clear as Alcibiades describes how beautiful Socrates is when he *opens up* (*Symp.* 216e), an image that may be interpreted in sexual (yet, also epistemic) terms.⁷³ Even though Socrates, as far as we know, *did not* open up sexually for Alcibiades, it looks nevertheless like what we might identify here is a switch of roles, so to speak, as Alcibiades challenges the pederastic norms revealed to us readers in Pausanias’ speech.⁷⁴

In his speech, Pausanias distinguishes between two sorts of *eros* which lead individuals in two quite opposite directions. We are introduced to a distinction between proper love, on one hand, and less proper, “vulgar” love on the other hand. Pausanias describes this distinction as follows, between 1) the “good Uranian love”, where the object of love is the boy’s soul, and the aim is to educate and instill virtue in this, and 2) the “bad Pandemotic love”, where the aim is sexual pleasure for the *erastes* (*Symp.* 180c–d). In other words, “heavenly”⁷⁵ Uranian

⁷² The term used to describe this “echo” is *anteros*. (A. Nehamas and P. Woodruff, translators of the *Phaedrus* printed in *Plato, Complete Works* edited by John M. Cooper (1997), translates *anteros* with “back-love”.)

⁷³ C.f., e.g., Nussbaum, 2007:189.

⁷⁴ Pausanias himself is by Plato presented as being in an *erastes-eromenos* relationship with Agathon (*Prt.* 315d–e).

⁷⁵ “Heavenly” because the term “Uranian” is derived from Uranus, the god of heaven (*Symp.* 180d). Moreover, Plato often describes the soul and *psyche* as winged, also in the *Phaedrus*, when Socrates says that the soul, divine or human, is “like the natural union of a team of winged horses and their charioteer” (*Phdr.* 246a). The

love aims towards knowledge and virtue, the Pandemotic love towards bodily sexual desire and pleasure. Thus we might understand the distinction to express mental and a physical state of *eros*. However, this is not to say that in Uranian love sexual intercourse does not occur, or that it is unacceptable.

In Diotima's account, sexual intercourse between a man and a boy of the same social class might arouse them to look up from particularities, now towards Beauty itself:

So when someone rises by these stages, through loving boys correctly, and begins to see this beauty, he has almost grasped his goal. This is what it is to go aright, or be led by another, into the mystery of Love: one goes always upwards for the sake of this Beauty, starting out from beautiful things and using them like rising stairs: from one body to two and from two to all beautiful bodies...in the end he comes to know what it is to be beautiful. (Diotima, *Symp.* 211b–c.)

Observe the formulation *through loving boys correctly*, quoted above. Here I would also like to note, that when discussing Plato's writings and Platonic studies upon the theme "love and the individual", it seems wrong not to mention that when it comes to moral reflections upon erotic love and the individual in Plato, the discussed human beings are men. As Singer wrote, "In the Greek society to which he [Socrates] belonged, love was generally assumed to be a male phenomenon" (Singer, 1984:49). Or as Vlastos puts it; "all he [Plato] sees in feminine beauty is the lure to paternity" (Vlastos, 1973:22), and "In every passage I can recall which depicts or alludes to the power of sexual desire the context is homosexual" (Vlastos 1973, footnote no. 74).

In *L'usage des plaisirs*, (*The Use of Pleasure*), Foucault repeatedly describes the ancient Greek morality as written by and for men, *une morale d'homme, faite par et pour les hommes*.⁷⁶ Naturally, this includes both "morality of love" and "sexual morality". However, we do not need to turn to Foucault in order to understand that ideal Platonic love does not include females. Women's connections to the body, birth, sickness, grief, death, changes, genesis, deconstruction, and so forth, does not fit with the Parmenidian-Platonic ideals.⁷⁷

erastes is also often described as *winged*, in the same way that Eros is sometimes portrayed and described with wings, c.f., i.e. *Phr.* 252b. For representations of the soul explicitly as a bird, one can for example turn to art from the Mycenaean period.

⁷⁶ Foucault didn't have time to finish his writings. What he *did* publish, however, was subject to severe criticism by for instance Martha Nussbaum, e.g. in her book review of *The Use of Pleasure* in the *New York Times*, 10.nov. 1985. Nonetheless, Foucault's writings clearly contributed to a hot discussion of sexuality in classical Athens, perhaps mostly in feminist and queer academic communities.

⁷⁷ Women's connection to earthly struggle and deconstruction is perhaps illustrated in its starkest form in the Greek myth about the first woman, Pandora, sent to earth as something *kakon* (bad/evil), given to humanity as a form of revenge by Zeus. Pandora was seen as the origin of the "the female race" as well as all struggle and unhappiness on earth (Hesiod, *Theogony*, 329ff; *Work and Days* 57f.)

Parmenides, often described as Plato's spiritual father, wrote about *being*, about immortality and eternity, and about the "genuine reality", which he described as detached from all kinds of genesis, growth, change and destruction. Mainly, perhaps especially in the *Republic*, Plato seems to share this conception.⁷⁸ Although it is ambiguous, c.f. the discussion in section 2.3.3, we may receive the impression that we ought to overrule death and grief, while the immortal, immutable and harmonious soul shall be worshipped. Moreover, that we ought to welcome death, which is simply a sloughing of the body, and releasing of the soul into the purely intellectual realm of Ideas, which represents the "genuine reality" and the soul's true home (*Rep.* 611b–612a).

And although Diotima firstly speaks of love as fertility in itself, and actually declares that: "when a man and a woman come together in order to give birth, this is a godly affair" (*Symp.* 206c), we have to conclude that her viewpoint (at least in Socrates' rendering) is that love between males is raised above love between man and woman (*Symp.* 208e–209b). Fleshly propagation seems to be subordinated in relation to spiritual propagation: actual children are less valuable, so to speak, compared to immortal "brain-children".

As mentioned, symposiums were loaded with erotic distractions and temptations. In the matter of self-control, Socrates himself, not surprisingly, appears to be the ideal. He is chosen to be the *symposiarch* of the symposium. His role as the *symposiarch* is to be the guide, the leader and lover, a masculine "midwife" through the gestation of "brain-children". Some may hold that Socrates is only interesting as one of many voices in Plato's writings. Undoubtedly, we may develop a more nuanced perspective when taking all the characters' voices into account when determining "what Plato meant", and I am inclined to believe that all of the speeches in the *Symposium* can be justly said to contain "Plato's meaning". However, Socrates *is* the main speaker in most of Plato's dialogues, and usually the personification of ideals and desirable qualities.

Socrates is seen as an exponent of the happy life, a life lived in *eudaimonia*. Youths, such as Apollodorus, Aristodemus and Alcibiades, look up to him. Socrates makes them realize what they themselves lack or should strive to achieve – just as Eros does.⁷⁹ We may identify even further parallels between Socrates and Eros: They are barefoot searchers, not beautiful or

⁷⁸ Like Parmenides, Plato also describes immortal "entities", e.g. the Ideas, in terms of *being*, as opposed to "entities" which are always in some aspect of *becoming*, c.f. the distinction being/becoming.

⁷⁹ C.f. section 3.5.

ugly, but *both* at the same time.⁸⁰ Briefly put, Socrates comes across as the personification of Eros, and a living symbol of The Philosopher.⁸¹ As in other dialogues, then, I think it's fair to say that Socrates here seems to incorporate the preferable qualities.

Nevertheless, there are major differences between Eros and Socrates as well. Eros is always stretching towards what he not *entirely is*; due to his mother he is always (in) *need*. Socrates, on the other hand, indeed *claims* his ignorance, but is, by and large, described as absolutely self-sufficient: He is in total control over his bodily desires, hardly affected by alcohol, cold, lack of food and water, or by young beautiful boys. (The only exception I can think of is when he glimpses Charmides' torso under his cloak (*Chrm.* 155c–d).) He often appears as rather careless and unapproachable, and although this is a doctrine of self-control, *not* of abstinence, “unlike Callicles' superman, Socrates is said to display *andreia* by *refusing* to have sex” (Hobbs, 2000:256). Socrates is admired by Alcibiades for his “moderation”, i.e. his refusal to have sex – at least with Alcibiades (*Symp.* 219d). This, to Alcibiades' proud mind, perhaps contributes to Alcibiades' view of Socrates as almost “non-human”, a peerless individual.⁸² So we have two rather different components, then, both pivotal in understanding Plato's theory of love, one of them chastity, the other the *paiderastia*.

Socrates does not seek pleasure – Socrates seeks wisdom *par excellence* – this appears not only through his rejection of Alcibiades, but also through his interaction with Apollodorus and Aristodemus. One *can* understand why he was accused of being arrogant (not just his contemporaries in Athens, but also modern readers of Plato have made similar remarks). For Socrates gives the impression that he suffers no need, not even the need of personal love. However, I think Nussbaum goes a bit too far, in arguing that: “Socrates has so dissociated himself from his body that he genuinely does not feel” (Nussbaum 2007:183). But Socrates, also the fictional Socrates, has friends. At the same time, he rarely proclaims his love for

⁸⁰ Although described as wise and beautiful within (by Alcibiades), I think Socrates' bodily appearance, as it is described and represented, is not so unlike the sculptors of the fat and snub-nosed Silenus (apart from Silenus' drunkenness). And that Socrates usually walked barefoot is confirmed in the beginning of the *Symposium*.

⁸¹ This becomes utterly clear when Alcibiades is praising Socrates in exactly the same terms as Socrates used when he praised *eros* in his speech (*Symp.* 219e–221b). Or is this perhaps one of Socrates' jokes, using “Diotima's speech” as a way of describing Eros as being similar to himself and getting away with it?

⁸² Perhaps we may identify a parallel between Socrates' cold attitude towards Alcibiades and what Socrates taught Hippothales in the *Lysis*? After all, Socrates advice to Hippothales was, briefly put, “not to make the boy swell-headed – humble him instead” (*Lys.* 205e–206e).

them. Moreover, despite refusing to live with them, preferring to stay true to his philosophical calling, he even has a wife and children (the *Apology* and the *Phaedo*).⁸³

We may also identify these two different ways of loving by taking another look at Aristophanes' speech, as the Aristophanic love offers an account of love free from the asymmetry organizing the complex *paiḗderastia*. While the "Aristophanic lover loved in a chancy way" (Nussbaum, 2007:181), risking that the "other half" might not love him back, might die or leave, the philosopher seemingly puts himself in a position where he is free of all these risks. While the Aristophanic lover, from time to time, let his passions distract him from doing what is right and good, the Socratic philosophers' love may be seen as "contemplative love for all beauty [that] carries no risk of loss, rejection, even frustration. Speeches and thoughts are always in our power to a degree that emotional and physical intercourse with loved individuals is not" (Nussbaum 2007:181). However, I believe that Nussbaum goes a bit far on this point, as Socrates in the *Phaedrus* in fact seems to value love's *mania* (madness), at least *mania-love* of some sorts.⁸⁴ This will be our subject of examination in the next section.

I have now outlined the hierarchic roles and norms within the *paiḗderastia*, and tried to position Socrates in relation to these. However, I believe a more profound investigation of the dialogue the *Phaedrus* may give us a more detailed answer to both how the *paiḗderastia* worked, and how *philia* and *eros* works together in interpersonal relationships.

4.2 Love and relationships in the *Phaedrus*

In the *Phaedrus* we meet Socrates again engaging in conversation with a young boy, this time a boy called Phaedrus. Although the *Phaedrus* cannot compete with the star gallery of characters offered in the *Symposium*, the *Phaedrus* "gives us a taste of all of Plato's styles, the elegant and the majestic, the ironic and the burlesque, the light and easy tones and the heavy professorial tones" (Wyller, 2001:183).⁸⁵ The variation of dramatic styles and dialects

⁸³ As Cooper writes, the *Apology* consists of Socrates' *defense speech* in court, and a defense is certainly what we get, "Socrates does not apologize for anything!" (Cooper, 1997:17) (In some aspects then, Socrates fits perfectly in with other classical dramatic portraits of a man who chooses his convictions and principles over his loved ones. E.g. Abraham in the Bible, Henrik Ibsen's *Brand*, etc.)

⁸⁴ I return to this point in section 4.2.

⁸⁵ E.A. Wyller in the introduction to his translation of the *Phaedrus*, printed in *Platon Samlede Verker IV*. My translation.

contributes to the dialogue being unforeseeable and entertaining, and this maximizing dramatic form suits the dramatic and vital content perfectly.

As previously stated, Vlastos barely mentions this dialogue, but I have nevertheless chosen to include it as a central part of this thesis, because it offers answers to: 1) how Socrates advises regarding loving interpersonal relationships, and; 2) three different accounts of love, whereas the third actually seems to meet Vlastos' demands.

Roughly said, the *Phaedrus* consists of three speeches:

1. The speech Phaedrus reads aloud to Socrates. This speech is written by Lysias, and is therefore called *Lysias' speech*.
2. Socrates' first speech: "Human madness"
3. Socrates' second speech: "Divine madness"

I begin with the first two speeches, before I turn to Socrates' second speech.

4.2.1 Madness and moderation

The core theme of the *Phaedrus* is from my point of view the boy Phaedrus' dilemma, which concerns his integrity and autonomy in love-affairs. As Socrates advises Phaedrus on this subject, we are entering an investigation of whether the effect of love is good or ill, (*Phdr.* 237c), and moreover, whether one should let oneself "go" and give in to love's madness, or rather be moderate and take precautions.

Erotic love has always been intimately connected to disappointments, rumors, shame and questions of integrity. Athens was, at this time, a relatively small city where everyone more or less knew everyone. In lack of an exact equivalent, to better understand the roles of the *erastes* and the *eromenos* I shall use the roughly analogies "older man and younger woman". Nussbaum offers an interesting comparison while using this analogy:⁸⁶ She asks us to imagine that instead of citizens they were colleagues, and further, that Phaedrus instead of being a beautiful young boy was a beautiful young woman, who tried to enter a male-dominated profession which she wanted to stay in for the rest of her life. The young woman (Phaedrus) is already regarded in a sexualized manner, and more or less surrounded by potential suitors. Now, imagine that the work-place is the whole city. There is nothing *but* colleagues, there are

⁸⁶ See Nussbaum *Fragility and Goodness; Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Chapter 7. (The analogy is also used by others; c.f. e.g., Reeve (2006).)

no other choices. What would one say to this young person? What would you have wanted for yourself?

The first two speeches of the *Phaedrus* advise that in search of your political, social and intellectual standing, you must above all protect yourself against emotional domination. The argument is that the individual in love, the lover, reasons poorly and cannot control himself. The lover is described as a *maniac*, sick, disturbed and mad,⁸⁷ as opposed to someone who is *sophrosune*. *Sophrosune* is one of the cardinal virtues in Plato, and in the ordinary Athenian language at Plato's time, one who was described as *sophrosune* was "in control of his desires" (Rademaker, 2004:195) The term may also be understood as an antagonism of outrageousness (*hubris*) (*Phdr.* 237e–238a). Briefly put, the advice is this: You must remain independent, and this is done by staying emotionally distant from "mad" lovers, as this lover is "likely to be untrustworthy and not 'pay what he owes' in exchange for the beloved's gratification" (Sheffield, p.17; *Phdr.* 241a). The outcome of a relationship with a "mad" lover is described as unpredictable, as conflicts rooted in jealousy may arise. This way then, the lover could possibly (most likely, some would hold) be bad for your career.

If you are going to have sexual intercourse with someone, then, make sure it is with someone who is *not* madly in love with you. Let's call him Lysias (as it was Lysias who wrote the speech which praises the non-lover, the speech which Phaedrus first admires and reads aloud to Socrates). The non-lover Lysias is a successful and established man who has learned the value of being self-restrained.⁸⁸ He offers a well-controlled sensual friendship, based on mutual pleasure and profit. With a man like this, the young woman (Phaedrus) may trust that no deep changes or conflicts would occur. Indeed, this seems like an attractive offer.

Summing up, in the first two speeches we are offered *two* accounts of loving relationships, with different foundations:

- 1) The "mad" loving relationship, based on the acquisition of *pleasure* predominantly for the lover.
- 2) The "non-loving" relationship, based on mutual exchange, *pleasure and profit*.

⁸⁷ C.f. the clarification of the term *eros* in the introduction, section 1.3.

⁸⁸ Lysias has most likely been taught the value of restraint by his wealthy, yet self-restricted father Cephalus, who in the *Republic* warned us against the "mad" influence of the passions in the beginning of Book 1.

Although the latter seems to be regarded as more preferable, both of these kinds of loving relationships will most likely face the previously discussed “fear of exchange”, as they will be confronted with problems regarding *consistency* of affection: The relationship will probably not endure when the boy, the *eromenos*, enters manhood and becomes a “full blown” citizen. Furthermore, these relationships are based on pleasure and/or (future) profit, and are in this way clearly instrumental in their form. They would therefore, at any rate, be affected by the previously discussed Vlastosian criticism against Plato’s theory of love, that 1) the beloved is not loved “for his own sake”, and 2) Platonic love between individual persons is essentially based on exploitation of the beloved.

“As Socrates puts it, lovers love boys – the way wolves love lambs. That’s a good reason for the lambs to protect themselves as well as possible” (Nussbaum, 2007:209). However, the non-mad person, who offers a relationship of the second kind, in all his restraint and proclaiming of *controlled* mutual pleasure and profit somehow seems ungenerous and uncaring, however “wise” it would be to choose him. And, as Socrates hints at, how does one really know that the non-lover actually is who he claims to be, a *non-lover*, and not a mad lover in disguise? (*Phdr.* 237b).

I believe this suspicion may be connected to the complexity of the ideology of the *paiderastia*. As mentioned, Pausanias outlined a distinction working within this erotic system (in the *Symposium*), which I previously described as symbolizing one mental state (Uranian love) and one physical state (Pandemotic love) of *eros*.⁸⁹ This second kind of love represents that which Lysias disparages in his speech. The Pandemotic love, obviously, has to disguise itself as “good Uranian love”, to protect the illusion that participation in this erotic system will be good for the young boys’ status and future prospects. For obviously, “It [Pandemotic love] cannot, then, be motivated by a reprehensible desire to adopt a passive, slavish, female, pleasure-seeking role. Instead, another motive must be invented for it – a willingness to accept ‘slavery for the sake of virtue’” (Reeve, 2006:xxv, *Symp.* 184c); or perhaps even clearer, “*paiderastia for philosophia*” (*Phdr.* 181c). So I think Socrates was onto something with his hinting: After all, he knew very well that being successful in loving boys includes knowing how to talk to them,⁹⁰ and tempting offers and promises are perhaps one of the most effective ways to go about it.

⁸⁹ See p.56

⁹⁰ C.f. his project in the *Lysis*, section 3.1.

Maybe, then, Lysias' distinction between the lover and the non-lover was, in effect, not fair after all. Moreover, even Pausanias' distinction seems to be too simple, as merely a moral distinction between "good and bad". Perhaps also the treatment of passionate erotic love as entirely bad was wrong?

4.2.2 A satisfying account of interpersonal love

The two first speeches, Socrates says, have treated love's *mania* as entirely bad, and *sophrosune* as entirely good (*Phdr.* 242e). Socrates now seems to experience a change of heart, as he goes on to argue that madness is not simply bad, on the contrary; *mania* can be a source of the highest good in life, "in fact the best of things have come from madness, when it is given as a gift of the god" (*Phdr.* 244a). Note that this speech is often called a *palinode*, as Socrates now seems to retract the standpoints previously given. Socrates offers the following examples of *divine madness*: prophets, mystic rites, "the madness from the Muses"; songs and poetry, and then, finally, interpersonal love: "We must not let anyone disturb us or frighten us with the claim that you should prefer the friend who is in control of himself to one who is disturbed" (*Phdr.* 245b).

I now turn to different ways of arguing that there *is* a satisfying account of love in Plato's writings. For an account is also given of a *third* type of relationship, and this one appears without the hierarchic structure which usually follows love described in terms of *eros*, where the lover ranks higher than the beloved. According to Sheffield, this kind of relationship is "grounded not in the opportunity the lover provides for profiting or honoring you, or pleasing you, but in his nature, *phusin*" (Sheffield p.18; *Phdr.* 252e). Once again, then, we face the amalgamation of ontology and morality.

Sheffield's reading of the *Phaedrus* may be used as an opposition to Vlastos'. She states that "the philosopher values the other as 'god-like', which, I take it, is to say that he values the other as such" (Sheffield, p. 18). As previously stated, in Vlastos' account, in loving another individual person the Platonic lover loves only the individual *qua* placeholder of the desired qualities, in other words, the "*statue* of goodness", or shall I rather say "statue of a god". But, in Socrates' second speech, as also Price recognizes, "the lover is unconsciously seeing in the boy not only Beauty itself, but also the god in whose train he (indeed, they) once saw Beauty. 'Godlike' takes on new force" (Price, 1990:84).

The central question here is then whether the boy/beloved's nature when being "godlike" and beautiful is *ontologically different* from the "god" or the Idea of Beauty itself. Another way of asking this question is by applying Vlastos' outline of Plato's tripartite ontology, how ontologically different is level 1 from level 3?⁹¹ Vlastos' perception is clear: "That (1) is radically distinct, (or as Aristotle was to put it, 'exists separately') from (3) I take to be the crux of this ontology" (Vlastos 1973:23). Due to this statement, my impression is that in Vlastos' interpretation, level 1 and level 3 are far more different from each other than in Sheffield's view, if she were to respond to Vlastos' outline of Plato's ontology. Sheffield writes that: "since this god-like nature is the other's original and true nature [*Phdr.* 252d], we can say that one loves the other for his nature (*phusin*)" (Sheffield, p. 20). On this point, then, Sheffield seems to be supported by Kosman:

appearances are not outlandish; they are citizens, ambassadors perhaps, sometimes in exile, but citizens nonetheless of that higher world, and their striving is thus revealed to be, as it were, auto-erotic, the eros of a world in love not with some alien empire, but with its own true order, that which is to it *psusei oikeion*. (Kosman 1976:54)

On Sheffield's account, then, since the beloved's characteristic goodness is something the lover recognizes and values as god-like, and treats with reverence and awe, we are inclined to say that the other is loved as an end (Sheffield, p.20). Recall that Vlastos focused on Plato's failure to treat individuals as "ends", Sheffield seems here to have a good argument for the opposite.

We shall also recall the phrase "love for the beloved's sake", which Vlastos perceived to be the core of Aristotle's definition of *philia*, the definition he claimed to use as the means of measuring Plato's theory of love. Interestingly, then, and central to our investigation of how this third kind stays up against Vlastos' charges, Price notes that without the mythology, Socrates does in the *Phaedrus* exemplify Aristotle's account of friendship of the good (Price, 1990:86; NE. 9.12.117a). Aristotle too describes three kinds (*eide*) of friendships (Cooper, 1999:315; NE. 1156a7, 1157b1). These are differentiated by their different grounds: pleasure, utility, and goodness (C.f., e.g. Price, 1990:104). Indeed, this seems similar to the three accounts of loving relationships discussed in the *Phaedrus*, as even the third kind of a loving relationship outlined in this dialogue, then, seems not so unlike that which Aristotle describes as the highest kind of friendship, that which is grounded in goodness. So if Vlastos really were, like he claimed, applying Aristotle's account of *philia* as his measurement of Plato's

⁹¹ See p. 10.

theory of love, it seems odd, with the *Phaedrus* taken into account, to argue that Plato fares worse than Aristotle.

Both Cooper and Nussbaum agree with Price on this point, as they respectively write that there is a “less significant difference between Aristotle and the Socrates of the *Phaedrus*” (Cooper 1999:400), and in Nussbaum’s words: “They are both [lover and beloved] mutually active and mutually receptive: from the one the other, like a Bacchant,⁹² draws in the transforming liquid; and he pours liquid back, in his turn, into the beloved soul.” (Nussbaum, 2007:219; *Phdr.* 253a)⁹³

When taking these perspectives into account, then, perhaps we may now make a more general claim, that the best kind of interpersonal love in Plato’s perspective is love where there are *two* lovers, who both try to instill virtue in the other’s soul. However, what if the instillation of virtue in the beloved’s soul is an act the lover does *not* for the beloved’s sake, so even if both of them are instilling virtue in the other, this is not to be viewed as interpersonal *love*, but as mutual exploitation for mutual benefit? Irwin expresses this issue clearly when he writes that “A is an exploitative lover if he cares only about moulding B closer to A’s ideal; A will then care about the ideal impersonally, not for B’s sake.” (Irwin 1977:270)

But, (and this is the crux of the argument): From Plato’s point of view, A is not exploiting B for some ideal *irrelevant* to B’s own interests. Having self-concern, as previously discussed, is for Plato to care for one’s own soul and to strive for its improvement and fulfillment. Likewise, having essentially concern for the other, for the beloved’s soul *is* to have essentially concern for the beloved as an individual.⁹⁴ Furthermore, it is not actually A who develops B’s soul, B’s virtue, and B’s wisdom. All A can do is to guide: B has to develop his own soul.⁹⁵

By following this line of reasoning we may argue that Plato’s theory of love in fact meets Vlastos’ demand of the beloved being loved “for his own sake”:

⁹² I think Nussbaum is here referring to the god of wine in Greek and Roman mythology, Bacchus, and I suppose that she by “a Bacchant” means someone who “follows” Bacchus. (Bacchus is also mentioned in the *Phaedrus*, 245a.)

⁹³ Nussbaum offers a brief but detailed comparison of Aristotle on friendship and the *Phaedrus*, see Nussbaum 2007, pp. 307–309.

⁹⁴ One could object on this point, arguing with reference to *Meno’s paradox*, and arguments in the *Republic* suggesting a strong determination on behalf of “what kind of soul” you are born with) that from Plato’s point of view, virtue cannot be taught. However, from my point of view, Plato’s “meaning” on this issue is that “learning virtue” is a matter of *revealing* true values, and revealing true values *is* possible, through Socratic guidance and deliberation, through guidance by a lover.

⁹⁵ C.f. the requirement of individual’s active involvement and engagement, discussed in section 4.1.

If we agree that a man's virtue is in his own interest, Plato's theory of love allows him to satisfy one of Aristotle's conditions for friendship or love, that it should aim at the beloved's interest for his own sake. (Irwin, 1977:268)

Thus, by taking this perspective into account, outlined by *Socrates himself* (which must be considered, especially since Vlastos treated Socrates as the only authoritative figure in Plato), in his second speech of the *Phaedrus*, we do not need to describe Plato's theory of love in terms of *utilization*, like Vlastos does.⁹⁶

4.3 Concluding remarks

Love is not in himself noble and worthy of praise; that depends on whether the sentiments he produces in us are themselves noble. Pausanias, *Symp.* 181a

The tradition of pederastic eros is clearly shown in the dialogues the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*. And as shown, when the roles within this tradition are taken into account, they offer us useful information while investigating Plato's theory of love. Especially, as argued, we gain information concerning the relation between *eros* and *eudaimonia*, as this system has an intimate connection (at least in the way Plato describes it) with the idea of the importance of individual learning, and thereafter, the development of self-knowledge, which, as we have seen, is crucial for being truly virtuous and therefore also for living the good eudaimonian life.

In the *Republic*, by and large, and especially in the *Phaedo*, the intellect is viewed as the only reliable guide for an individual person towards the good life. Appetites and emotions, in particular interpersonal love and sexual feelings, are held to be unsuitable for this purpose. But in the *Symposium*, and as shown especially in the *Phaedrus*, it seems necessary for an individual person to have first-hand knowledge of these feelings, gained through active engagement and experience, in order to recognize what is valuable in life. When the values worth pursuing are recognized, then the soul is "fertilized", and the reproduction Diotima

⁹⁶ Moreover, I think this affects Fossheim's view that there is no place for individuality in Plato's theory of love, discussed in chapter 1:

the classical system of paederasty that Plato takes as his point of departure too is about socializing the young man into a whole greater than himself, of getting him to function, and see himself as functioning, as a part of a greater whole. The classical paederasty system too is about community and not about individuality. But Plato would appear to go even further, in setting out community in a way that not only frames individuality, but obliterates it. (Fossheim 2010:51)

On the contrary, I believe that for Plato, the best kind of love, including the best kind of pederastic love, is that which cares for the beloved's soul – and that is, I take it, *not* to obliterate the beloved's individuality, but to develop and increase it.

talked about may begin: the gestation and birth of “brain-children”, which in fact has turned out to be a reproduction of virtues, a realization of the Ideas.

I previously argued that Socrates was admired for his moderation, for being nearly unapproachable, in total control of himself. These are indeed traditional ideals in matters of love and sexual relations.⁹⁷ But is the Socratic life the life we want for ourselves?⁹⁸ As Alcibiades says, we are the jury (*Symp.* 219c). Notably, however unwise this jury may turn out to be, Alcibiades’ words fits perfectly with Socrates’ dictum *know thyself*.⁹⁹ Note that in the later dialogues, *know thyself* turns up precisely at those moments when Socrates is discussing the soul, the problem of contingency, and the possibility of understanding (C.f. McCabe 1994:297); all problems which we have seen to occur in Plato’s theory of love.

We thus see a clear connection to the previously discussed importance of individual learning. But furthermore, we see contours of Plato’s view on *self-knowledge* as an ethical concept. We find an interesting formulation of this concept in Kierkegaard, insofar as we can conclude that he was significantly influenced by Plato when he wrote the following words:

The expression *gnothi seauton* [know thyself] has been repeated often enough and in it has been seen the goal of all human endeavor. That is quite right, too, but it is equally certain that it cannot be the goal if it is not at the same time the beginning. The ethical individual knows himself, but this knowledge is not a mere contemplation (for with that the individual is determined by his own necessity), it is a reflection upon himself which itself is an action, and therefore I have deliberately preferred to use the expression “choose oneself” instead of know oneself. (Kierkegaard, *Either/or*, Vol.II, p.260)

In this way, the previously discussed self-concern, now with its relation to self-knowledge, turns out to be a central part of Plato’s ethical concept. However, it is also worth mentioning that Kierkegaard too was accused of defending an egoistic conception of morality.¹⁰⁰ The strong agent-focus present in both Plato’s and Kierkegaard’s writings clearly differs from moral theories merely concerned about how one should treat *others*, and indeed, Plato’s and Kierkegaard’s theories seem to provoke many modern philosophers who are concerned with morality and ethics. As Richard Kraut writes, that “Each person should promote his own good (...) is crucially different from egoism, for that doctrine holds that one should have direct concern for oneself *and no one else*.” (Kraut 2007:49) As previously argued, Plato’s reference

⁹⁷ I am here thinking along the lines of Christian/Catholic/Victorian views on sexual morality.

⁹⁸ My point is not that “everyone” may easily choose the Socratic lifestyle, but that we may regard his lifestyle as preferable, and hence try to make his way of life our own.

⁹⁹ Most likely inspired by the Parmenidean *You think*.

¹⁰⁰ C.f., e.g. Moran (2001)

to the agent's final good does not by itself give evidence for the criticism of Plato's theory of love being egoistical.

In the *Phaedrus* philosophy itself is said to be a form of madness. It seems like the good life consists of the understanding of love, and that Socrates, in fact, is well aware of the roles madness and sanity, interpersonal "mad" love and rational aspiration plays in this matter, and that they are *not* just opposites which may possibly lead to conflicts, but also necessary in the acquisition of knowledge. It would be an illusion, then, to think that we have to choose either Socrates' "self-sufficiency" or Alcibiades' "madness", instead we should insist on the erotic position, the one "in-between".

The Platonic individual person's central components are the ability of deliberation between one's cognitive reflections and one's passionate desires. This is discussed throughout the *Phaedrus*. Interestingly, then, recalling one of the main questions in the discussion of chapter 2, *What is an individual?*, the Platonic view of what constitutes the individual thus does not actually seem to differ so much from modern perspectives which highlight the subject as precisely an entity with beliefs and desires. Moreover, the central (ethical) project in an individual person's life, according to Plato, is to develop one's rationality and feelings, and to try to avoid conflicts between these, try to make the two horses run in the same direction.¹⁰¹ From my point of view, these central components are carefully examined and discussed in the *Phaedrus*. This, in addition to Socrates' advice and reflections on how one should orient oneself in loving relationships, makes the *Phaedrus* one of the Platonic dialogues which strikes me the most with its sudden breath of actuality.

¹⁰¹ C.f. the *Phaedrus*, 246b.

5 Conclusion

Several scholars have argued that Vlastos went too far in his conclusion. Nevertheless, even Nussbaum, who mostly disagrees with his reading on Platonic love and the individual, writes that “yet, despite our questions, we feel that Vlastos must somehow be right. He is certainly pointing to something that we say and feel about being in love, however unsure we are of what we mean in saying it.” (Nussbaum, 2007:167) Indeed, Vlastos’ article remains one of the most authoritative to address our subject, love and the individual in Plato, and he succeeded in giving his readers the impression that Plato’s view on interpersonal love is problematic. However, I have to conclude that he was by and large mistaken in his evaluation of the morality of Platonic love, and that the predominant cause of this is that he fails in his treatment of the dialogues’ premises and backdrops, as well as understanding the full extent of Plato’s metaphysical presuppositions on the subject.

Throughout this thesis I have discussed his criticism, and highlighted phenomena he treated insufficiently. I have looked into the problems connected to individuals surfacing within Plato’s theory of love, and suggested how Plato’s theory of love might be attacked and defended. In the following last paragraphs I sum up and try to clarify my concluding comments even further.

Vlastos too readily maps problems considering the distinction between Ideas and particulars onto another distinction; that between instrumental and final goods. He does this in arguing that particulars, which in his perspective include individual persons, are only *steps* towards the *ends* represented by the Ideas, and that a beloved individual person in this process of climbing up the ladder is *bypassed*, that the lover fails to love his beloved *qua* the unique individual the beloved is.

This gives us the impression that from Vlastos’ point of view, all Plato and the Platonic lover are concerned about is the Ideas. But I think it is a mistake to believe that individuals do not have a proper place within Plato’s theory of love. The distinction between particulars and Ideas which represents problems throughout Plato’s dialogues is utterly complex, in the same way that the ontology of individual persons is. I have argued that Vlastos fails to see how individuals have a special position in relation to the ontological distinction of “being/becoming”. I have also argued that he fails to see the difference between loving “something” and loving “someone”. It strikes me that Vlastos, who consistently refers to the

individuals as *objects* of love, fails to pay attention to the fact that individuals for Plato, as for so many other philosophers, have a special ontological status.

With this view, then, Vlastos fails to see individuals as *subjects* of love, active individual persons striving towards the realization of the Ideas. Recalling his tripartite outline of Plato's ontology, it strikes me that he holds that the three levels are not only distinct, but that individuals are completely redundant compared to the Ideas, they are passive entities who "may or may not" copy the Ideas.¹⁰² Moreover, as previously hinted to,¹⁰³ could one not argue that it is the other way around; that it is the theory of the Ideas that, in the very end, is instrumental in individuals' understanding of themselves and what the *eudaimon*-life consists in?

How we should live, according to Plato, seems to depend on the relation between knowledge, virtue and happiness. The acquisition of knowledge and virtue will improve an individual's prospects of living a good life, a life in *eudaimonia*. And interpersonal love is crucial in this always ongoing acquisition – so interpersonal love is an important aspect of living a life in *eudaimonia*. But, and this I think everyone agrees on, in Plato's theory of love no individual person can be accorded the status of *proton philon*. To Vlastos' mind this was provocative, but I think I concur with Plato here: no single individual person should be that which one's happiness in life depends on.

Vlastos' concept of love seems at best narrow, at worst totally out of place. Is it not terribly naive to hold on to an idea suggesting that one's own happiness is distinguished from the happiness of one's beloved? I have argued that there is a difference between being *selfish* and being *self-interested*: My concern with myself is not selfish when the aim is to become more virtuous, as having virtues not only contributes to my own happiness, but also to my ability of helping and caring for others, their souls and theirs prospects of living good lives.

Naturally, feelings of care and concern may occur as a result of interpersonal erotic contact, but is *not* the most important aspect of proper Platonic *eros*. But that care is not the most important aspect of Platonic *eros* does not justify the charge of egoism: Plato's theory of love is *not* essentially egoistic, but it highlights the lover's interests and what *he* believes is (for) the beloved's good. I have argued that one of the most important aspects of Platonic love,

¹⁰² C.f. p.10, the second level in the tripartite ontology he outlines.

¹⁰³ See p.25

namely *self-knowledge*, in line with being virtuous, is both for one's own *and* one's beloved's good. Even if one does not believe that the Socratic lifestyle is that which would lead one towards the happy life, one cannot deny that the Socratic method of individual learning and pursuit of self-knowledge, when being successful, helps to reveal one's knowledge of what virtue and happiness is. Socrates, the *symposiarch*, has thus guided us by demonstration: The best one can do towards one's beloved is to help them to realize which "things" are worth pursuing, what kind of "things" that lead to *eudaimonia*.

And in the end, what we all strive for is happiness; and we do not strive for it because of something that would follow from it. Happiness is our final end, and happiness is the final end of love. The connection between happiness and love can thus not be overrated: in Plato's theory of love, as well as in human life overall. As previously mentioned, Aristotle wrote that although we may all agree to the claim that the name of the final good is "happiness", we may still disagree about the content of this term. An extreme Kantian, concerned with moral principles and duties will probably never reach agreement with, say, Kierkegaard's character *Johannes the Seducer*, who only cares for the *actual outcome* of a deed, and how "pleasant" that turns out to be. Moreover, not all of us share the ideal of the active, engaging love which culminates in some kind of birth. Someone may hold that the purpose of loving another individual person is *not* to actively live and create with that person. On the contrary, what they want from love (or all they require from it) is, roughly said, someone to avoid loneliness with, someone to grow old and "die in common with" – a view Plato's theory of love also touches upon (*Symp.* 192e).

The metaphysical aspects and the strong idealism in Plato's writings, culminating in Platonic aspirations which sometimes make him *seem* out of place, ("The Philosopher King of Absurdity", even) may lead us to forget the *realism* in Plato. There is always a voice opposing his idealism, sometimes only lurking in the background, yet always present, tying him to the world of appearances. Vlastos argued that what the Platonic lover really loves is the Idea, such as the Idea of Beauty. But, as I have argued, to love the Idea of Beauty is to love the realization of beauty, in Plato's account of love, *the realization of beauty in one's soul and others'*. That the Platonic lover really loves the Idea does thus *not* contradict with the Platonic lover loving another individual person. Ideas, virtues or individual persons, the Platonic lover loves good "things" which contribute to *eudaimonia*.

During this thesis' gestation, one article in particular, beside Vlastos' of course, has caused me much puzzlement. The article I am thinking about is Kosman's "Platonic Love". I want to finish this paper with a quote from this article, which I believe perfectly sums up and expresses my view on love and the individual, the morality of Platonic love, and its metaphysical presuppositions:

Love is the power by which, recognizing the beauty in another, we bring forth that beauty by eliciting it, calling it forth. We thus call forth the other's true *virtue*, for virtue is, as we know, ontologically like goodness and beauty; it is the mode of an entity's *being itself well*. So cosmically love is that principle which draws the world toward *itself*, not just, as Erixymachus claimed, toward something else, but toward its own good and beautiful being. (Kosman, 1976:65)

Appendix: Gregory Vlastos

Gregory Vlastos (1907–1991) was born in Istanbul, and graduated from Robert College in 1925. He wanted to continue his studies in America, specializing in religious divinity. According to the well known story he often told his students, he followed his determination even though his priest and family did not give him their approval, because if he went, they warned him, he would lose his soul.

Vlastos did not “lose his soul”. His Christian belief is indeed reflected in his work, and although he is best known for his studies on Plato and Socrates, he has also published on Christian Faith.¹⁰⁴ The dialectic between his Christian and Platonic convictions is also present in his article “The Individual as an Object of Love in Plato”. Briefly put, human uniqueness, worth and equality forms the background when he highlights the problems of the individual as an object of love in Plato.

The article is regarded to be one of Vlastos’ two most influential later pieces, along with “Justice and Equality” (1962). Vlastos obtained his Ph.D. in Philosophy in 1931 at Harvard University. He became Sage Professor of Philosophy at Cornell University in 1948, and stayed there until becoming Stuart Professor of Philosophy at Princeton University (1955–1976), and thereafter Mills Professor at University of California, Berkeley until 1987. He received the highest honors for his work, including two Guggenheim Fellowships and the MacArthur Foundation’s Prize Fellowship in 1990. Many of his former students are today important scholars of ancient philosophy, including Terence Irwin, Richard Kraut, Paul Woodruff and Alexander Nehamas.

¹⁰⁴ *Christian Faith and Democracy*, (1939)

Abbreviations

<i>Apl.</i>	<i>Apology</i>
<i>Chrm.</i>	<i>Charmides</i>
<i>Crtl.</i>	<i>Cratylus</i>
<i>EN.</i>	<i>The Nicomachean Ethics</i>
<i>Ethd.</i>	<i>Euthydemus</i>
<i>Lys.</i>	<i>Lysis</i>
<i>Meta.</i>	<i>Metaphysics</i>
<i>Meno</i>	<i>Meno</i>
<i>Phae.</i>	<i>Phaedo</i>
<i>Phdr.</i>	<i>Phaedrus</i>
<i>Prt.</i>	<i>Protagoras</i>
<i>Rep.</i>	<i>Republic</i>
<i>Rhet.</i>	<i>The Rhetoric</i>
<i>Symp.</i>	<i>Symposium</i>
<i>Tht.</i>	<i>Theaetetus</i>

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